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# TIME

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*The Rizvi family  
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house in Dublin,  
Ohio, for a potluck  
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Ramadan on May 5*

*Photograph by*  
*Eli Hiller for TIME*

**ON THE COVER:**  
*Jordan Casteel,*  
*God Bless the*  
*Child, 2019.*  
*Oil on canvas;*  
*36 x 30 in./ 91.44 x*  
*76.2 cm*  
*© Jordan Casteel.*  
*Courtesy Casey*  
*Kaplan, New York.*  
*Photo credit: Jason*  
*Wyche. From the*  
*private collection of*  
*Dr. Anita Blanchard*  
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## Ben's Chili Bowl

4.4 ★★★★★



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DIRECTIONS



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# From the Editor

## A new path forward

A YEAR AGO, WE AT *TIME* STARTED TALKING about the ways we've fallen short.

Soon after George Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis, staffers from across the organization began sharing painful memories of being mistreated in our workplace and demanding change. I called Edward, our editor-in-chief, whose words you usually read in this space, to ask if he would consider inviting the people in our newsroom who identify as Black, Indigenous and people of color to lead our coverage of racial justice. For all of our focus on telling stories about the need for diversity and inclusion, we needed a push toward centering the voices of our own staff in that work; this was just one of many shifts in perspective we've held one another accountable for making over the past year. The result of that conversation is this week's cover package, *Visions of Equity*. It's the first of its kind for *TIME*—a project dreamed up and led by BIPOC staff.

We begin with a reality check on American history from senior correspondent Janell Ross, who argues that the country is stuck in a pattern of talking about racial inequality but doing little to solve it. Examining the data, staff writer Andrew R. Chow asks why the rate of police killings has not changed since Floyd was killed. And a team of reporters from around the world, led by Naina Bajekal, our editorial director for newsroom development and a leader on the project, tracks movements for justice in eight nations that have gained momentum over the past year.

**FROM THERE, WE LOOK FORWARD.** Executive editor John Simons interviews two business leaders about the challenge of pushing institutions in a new direction. To capture the solidarity and joy that can be found in communities of color—which are so often depicted by the media through the lens of pain and trauma—we follow members of five BIPOC “pods” that have become sources of ongoing strength for one another. Our centerpiece is the Equity Agenda, a list of 40 ways for the U.S. to become a safer, more equitable nation. To make the list, a team led by associate editor Mahita Gajanan consulted with dozens of experts, leaders and innovators, from Fred Hampton Jr. to Tarana Burke to Dr. Rachel Levine, all of whom also wrote for the package. Editorial producer Nadia Suleman provided leadership and guidance from the project's start and served as a managing editor.

To close, *TIME* journalists reflect on the



*Visions of Equity, led by those pictured, features the ideas and work of dozens of members of the BIPOC at TIME employee resource group and other contributors*

**Evolving our newsroom starts by asking for space and centering fresh voices within it**

complex experience of covering stories about people who share their identities—and articulate the lessons they will carry onward throughout their careers. These essays mean the most to me personally, as they honor the range of my colleagues' perspectives and speak to their growth over the past year. I value the honesty in these pieces when it comes to the fact that we still have work to do. One of the biggest challenges of this project was contending with the obstacles to representation and inclusion that exist not only in our newsroom but also in our industry at large—as international art director Victor Williams and director of photography Katherine Pomerantz, also leaders of the issue, experienced in seeking visuals for these stories. They found that while images of injustice abound, images that can represent equity are harder to define, and artists of color have rarely been supported in pursuit of that work. We are thrilled to feature Jordan Casteel's intimate and hopeful painting *God Bless the Child* on our cover and were understanding when it came to the need to earn her trust. “Pushing for equity and all it entails is hard,” Casteel says. “I want to be sure that my work is valued and remarkable for the qualities it has.”

Evolving our newsroom starts by asking for space and centering fresh voices within it. In her reflective piece—her first essay for *TIME*—my colleague Jenna Caldwell, a production associate, offers an enduring lesson. “Advocating on behalf of yourself isn't something you learn in school,” she writes. “It's something you can truly learn only by witnessing how it's done up close.”

Lucy Feldman,  
SENIOR EDITOR  
@LUCY\_FELDMAN





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NEW



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AND LASTS. AND LASTS.**

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# Conversation



## WHAT YOU SAID ABOUT...

**100 MOST INFLUENTIAL COMPANIES** Leaders of companies named to TIME's first ever list of the world's most influential (May 10/ May 17) had thoughts on the recognition. "Education has the power to reduce economic inequality," wrote Duolingo CEO Luis von Ahn, adding that the language-learning company "will continue to do [its] part to help build a more equitable world." On Twitter, General Motors CEO Mary Barra reiterated her call for "an all-electric future," while Mads Nipper, CEO of renewable-energy company Orsted, promised to continue working "towards a world that runs entirely on green energy." And on Instagram, Gro Intelligence CEO Sara Menker thanked her employees, writing that "having a brilliant, dedicated and mission-driven team ... is everything."

**'My biggest hope is this cover might inspire other little girls to think, "I can do that!"'**

REESE WITHERSPOON, on Instagram

**A CRY FROM THE HEART** In the same issue, readers were moved by Janell Ross's dispatch from Minneapolis on former police officer Derek Chauvin's conviction for the murder of George Floyd. "This decision is more than a trial," Etienne Lwamba wrote on Twitter. "It is also a step in the debate" over racial justice and police accountability. "These cries have changed the course of history," added @CreCro65. "May this family now find peace." And the jury's verdict should serve as motivation for advocates and reformers moving forward, tweeted Robin Harris: "We must all be the change we seek."

**'A story of pain and hope, masterfully told.'**

JOSE SALCEDO, on Twitter

## Behind the cover

"What does equity look like? What does equity feel like?" TIME art director Victor Williams posed these questions to New York City-based artist Jordan Casteel. Her response—the portrait *God Bless the Child*, which appears on the cover of this issue—was created to foster a connection between viewers and the art itself. Casteel sees her art as a continuance of work undertaken by her grandfather Whitney Young. President of the National Urban League in the 1960s, Young had the ear of President Lyndon B. Johnson as he shaped his War on Poverty program. "Empathy is a necessity for equity," Casteel tells TIME, noting that art too can play a key role in centering equitable politics—and an equitable culture. Read more about Casteel's cover at [time.com/equity-cover](https://time.com/equity-cover)



**IN ORBIT** In the second episode of the Felix & Paul Studios and TIME Studios immersive series *Space Explorers: The ISS Experience*, see how astronauts conduct scientific experiments while aboard the International Space Station. Head to [time.com/space](https://time.com/space) to learn how to view the series.

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# For the Record

**‘How am I supposed to represent a country that doesn’t even represent me?’**

**LIZ CAMBAGE,**

Australian WNBA player, in a May 6 Instagram story criticizing a promotional photo shoot for Australia’s Olympic and Paralympic teams that featured no athletes of color; after threatening to boycott the Tokyo Games, Cabbage said she will participate



**95**

Age of Cecil Lockhart when he died on May 4. Lockhart’s liver was later donated to a woman in her 60s, making him the oldest organ donor in U.S. history

**‘It is clear that China is failing to meet responsible standards regarding their space debris.’**

**BILL NELSON,**

NASA administrator, in a May 8 statement on debris from the Chinese Long March 5B rocket, which splashed into the Indian Ocean on May 9 after an “uncontrolled re-entry” from orbit

**‘WE MUST SPEAK THE TRUTH. OUR ELECTION WAS NOT STOLEN. AND AMERICA HAS NOT FAILED.’**

**LIZ CHENEY,**

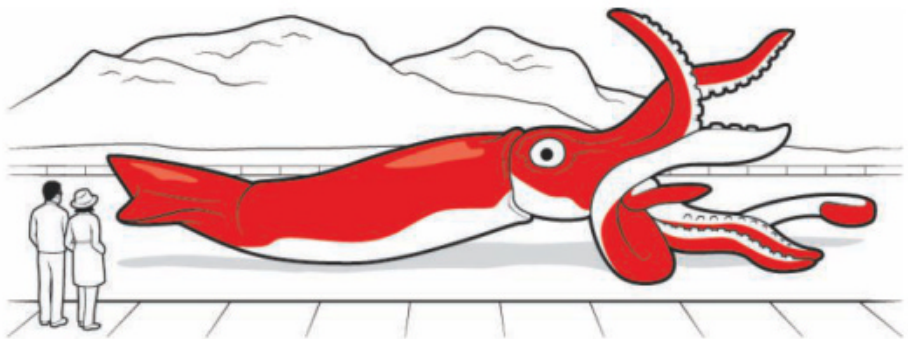
Wyoming Republican, in a May 11 speech—the day before she was ousted from GOP House leadership after she continued to rebut former President Trump’s false claims of widespread voter fraud in the 2020 election

**9**

Number of babies a 25-year-old Malian woman gave birth to on May 4, believed to be a world record

*‘I stand behind what I am doing, though it is painful for me that I cannot do it in tune with the church leadership.’*

**THE REV. JAN KORDITSCHKE,** a German Jesuit discussing his decision to bless queer couples despite a recent Holy See decree banning the practice; around 100 churches across Germany offered such services the week of May 10



**25 million yen**

Amount of COVID-19 stimulus funding (about \$225,000) spent by a Japanese fishing port on a large statue of a squid, intended to attract tourists

**‘As fun as it is, it’s just not a challenge anymore.’**

**ELLEN DEGENERES,**

in a May 12 interview with the *Hollywood Reporter* explaining why she decided the forthcoming 19th season of her daytime talk show—which faced allegations in July of a toxic workplace—will be its last



**GOOD NEWS**  
of the week

**A World Wildlife Fund study released on May 11 found that, across the world, areas of forest equivalent to the size of France have regrown over the past 20 years**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BROWN BIRD DESIGN FOR TIME



# The Brief



**A NATION  
MOURNS**  
At a New Delhi  
cremation  
ground, the  
funereal fires cool  
off only briefly  
late at night

**INSIDE**

HOUSE GOP MEMBERS STAGE  
TRUMP RALLIES—SANS TRUMP

RANSOMWARE ATTACK BLOCKS  
A MAJOR U.S. OIL PIPELINE

RIISING UNREST AND VIOLENCE  
ROIL ISRAEL AND GAZA STRIP

PHOTOGRAPH BY ATUL LOKE

*The Brief is reported by Madeleine Carlisle, Suyin Haynes, Sanya Mansoor, Ciara Nugent, Billy Perrigo, Madeline Roache and Olivia B. Waxman*



## WORLD

# India's disaster is a global crisis

By Billy Perrigo

**H**IGH IN THE THIN AIR OF THE MOUNT EVEREST Base Camp in Nepal, Sherpas and climbers used to walk freely from one group of tents to another, holding gatherings, singing and dancing. Now the Sherpas who escort climbers to the summit have a new job: enforcing unofficial social-distancing rules. “Climbing Everest is always a matter of life and death,” says Phunuru Sherpa. “But this year, the risk has been doubled due to COVID.” Already, dozens of people with suspected COVID-19 have been evacuated by helicopter. The outbreak reflects a broader one across Nepal, which shares a long, porous border with India. Daily confirmed cases in the Himalayan nation increased thirtyfold from April 11 to May 11, when 9,300 infections were recorded. It’s a grim omen of how India’s devastating COVID-19 crisis may be turning into an even bigger global emergency.

As countries around the world airlift oxygen, vaccines and medical supplies to India, they are also closing their borders to the world’s second most populous country. It may already be too late. The B.1.617 variant of the virus, first detected in India, has now been found in 44 countries on every continent except Antarctica—including Nepal, the U.S. and much of Europe. Scientists say it could be more infectious and better at avoiding humans’ immune systems. On May 10, the World Health Organization declared it a variant of “global concern.” And because only around 0.1% of positive samples in India are being genetically sequenced, “there may well be others that have emerged,” says Amita Gupta, deputy director of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Clinical Global Health Education.

**THE TRUE SCALE** of the COVID-19 outbreak in India is impossible to accurately quantify. Officially, confirmed daily cases are plateauing just under 400,000 but remain higher than any other country has seen during the pandemic. Experts warn that the real numbers are far bigger, and may still be rising fast as the virus rips through rural India, where two-thirds of the population lives and where testing infrastructure is frail. The University of Washington’s Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) estimates the true number of new daily infections is around 8 million—the equivalent of the entire population of New York City being infected every day. Official reports say 254,000 people have died in India since the start of the pandemic, but the IHME

estimates the true toll is more than 750,000—a number researchers predict will double by the end of August. Since the beginning of May, dozens of bodies have washed up on the banks of the river Ganges, with some villagers saying they were forced to leave the dead in the water amid soaring funeral costs and shortages of wood for cremation.

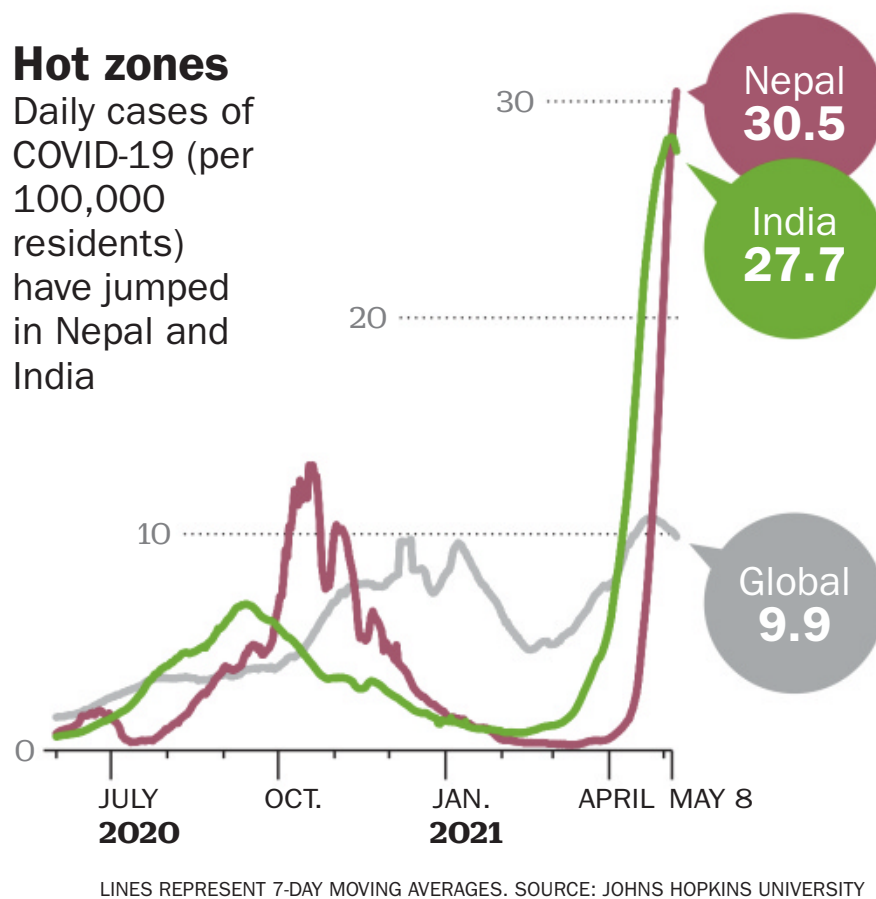
Experts say that the crisis was entirely predictable, and that rich countries could have done more to prevent it. “The pandemic has once again highlighted the extreme international inequality in access to lifesaving vaccines and drugs,” says Bina Agarwal, professor of development economics and environment at the University of Manchester. The Indian government failed to order enough vaccines for its population—or ramp up its vaccination program fast enough. But for months, the U.S. also blocked exports of crucial raw materials India needed to manufacture vaccines, and stockpiled 20 million AstraZeneca shots even though the FDA had not authorized their use. Although President Biden has now changed course, sending much-needed vaccine raw materials to India and pledging to export the AstraZeneca shots, it will take a long time for the country to catch up: only 2.8% of the population was fully vaccinated as of May 12.

India’s brutal second COVID-19 wave is sparking worries that the worst of this global pandemic is still ahead. Especially concerning are densely populated African countries, many of which have yet to experience large outbreaks. Versions of the B.1.617 variant have already been reported in Angola, Rwanda and Morocco. Many of the vaccines that could curb outbreaks in such countries were meant to come from factories in India—which has now ordered that most of its vaccine production be used domestically.

Meanwhile, tragedy is sparing few families across India. Rahul Thakkar, a 42-year-old vice president of a health care startup, died of COVID-19 on May 10—after the New Delhi ICU ward where he was being treated ran out of oxygen in late April. “When the infrastructure breaks down, being rich or poor doesn’t save you,” says Ramanan Laxminarayan, a friend of Thakkar’s. Laxminarayan, an Indian-American epidemiologist and director of the D.C.-based think tank Center for Disease Dynamics, Economics and Policy, began an international fundraising campaign—raising more than \$9 million to import oxygen cylinders and concentrators, which turn air into medical-grade oxygen. The effort should never have been necessary, Laxminarayan says. While India should have invested in its pandemic preparedness, he says, developed countries share a portion of responsibility. “Even out of a sense of self-protection, rich countries should have planned much better for vaccinating the entire world and increasing production,” Laxminarayan says. “What happens in India doesn’t stay in India.” —With reporting by ROJITA ADHIKARI/MOUNT EVEREST BASE CAMP, NEPAL

### Hot zones

Daily cases of COVID-19 (per 100,000 residents) have jumped in Nepal and India







**ONGOING UNREST** Amid mass demonstrations over inequality across Colombia—now entering their third week—protesters scaled a statue of independence hero Simón Bolívar in Bogotá on May 1. Sparked by a now scrapped tax hike, mostly peaceful marches escalated into clashes with police, who have used excessive force, per the U.N. By May 11, a local NGO said, 40 protesters had died. That same day, the country's government said it would negotiate with protest leaders. —Ciara Nugent

## NATION

### The U.S. birth rate dropped in 2020, but don't blame it all on COVID-19

**ABOUT 142,000 FEWER BABIES WERE** born in the U.S. in 2020 than in 2019, according to provisional figures from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released on May 5. In total, there were 3.6 million births in 2020, a 4% drop from 2019. Additionally, the general fertility rate also dropped 4% last year, to 55.8 births per 1,000 women ages 15 to 44 (who account for 99.7% of births). That rate set a record low for the country, according to the CDC. But unlike most health news pertaining to last year, the COVID-19 pandemic was not the primary cause for the decline.

**MISCONCEPTIONS** While COVID-19 may have played some role in the number of births during the final weeks of the year, the overall picture is more indicative of a continued fertility decline in the country. The vast majority of 2020 babies were conceived before the pandemic's onset: full-term babies conceived around Jan. 22, when the first case of COVID-19 was reported in the U.S., were born in late October. And those conceived after March 13, when the U.S. declared a national emergency, were born starting in mid-December.

**DOWNWARD TRENDS** Since 2014, the last year during which the number of births increased, the U.S. has experienced a six-year downward streak, averaging 2% fewer births per year. Birth rates have been sinking across demographics, and 2020 was no exception. Every race and ethnic group and every age group from 15 to 44 had a lower rate. And for girls ages 15 to 19, the rate dropped 8%, continuing a decline in teen pregnancy apparent every year since 1991 with the exception of 2006 and 2007.

**SMALL STEPS** Many issues exacerbated by the pandemic—including financial instability, health-related anxieties and a lack of support for working parents—could factor into the drop in births continuing in 2021. The matter is motivating some lawmakers to act; the American Rescue Plan upped this year's child tax credits to \$3,600 for each child under 6 and to \$3,000 for children up to 17. More recently, President Biden has floated proposals to expand paid-leave programs and improve childcare access and affordability. Whether those ideas become legislation is uncertain, however, as Republicans aren't fully supportive. —EMILY BARONE

## NEWS TICKER

### NCAA exec supports athlete deals

National Collegiate Athletic Association president Mark Emmert told the *New York Times* on May 8 that he would now recommend that colleges enact rules **allowing student athletes to accept endorsement deals**, in the face of new laws in Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and New Mexico.

### Laos records first COVID-19 death

More than a year into the pandemic, Laos **recorded its first COVID-19-related death**, on May 9, state media reported. The 53-year-old woman's death comes amid a surge in cases in the country after the Lao New Year holiday, which took place in mid-April, and a wider wave of infections across Southeast Asia.

### Biden restores LGBTQ health protections

The Biden Administration announced May 10 that it will **protect gay and transgender people** against sex discrimination in health care, reversing a Trump-era policy that had defined one's sex as the gender assigned at birth, excluding transgender people.





Gaetz and Greene at the “America First” rally in The Villages, Fla.

## POSTCARD

### Acolytes try a Trump rally without Trump

FOR AN HOUR AND A HALF ON MAY 7, IT WAS AS if the 2020 election had never ended. The elderly crowd in The Villages, a sprawling central Florida retirement community nestled among billboards for orange juice and baby alligators, came dressed in Donald Trump gear, from well-worn TRUMP 2016 hats to 2020 WAS RIGGED T-shirts. The kickoff of the America First revival tour meticulously followed Trump’s rally playbook, from the soundtrack to the shouts of “Lock her up!” to the largely unmasked seniors heckling the media in the back.

The event’s hosts, Representatives Matt Gaetz and Marjorie Taylor Greene, were on a mission to re-create the magic of the Trump era. In some ways they seemed an unlikely duo: a Florida Congressman under federal investigation for sex trafficking, and a freshman from Georgia with a track record of promoting far-right conspiracies. But together, Gaetz and Greene have launched a joint effort to position themselves as the inheritors of the former President’s “Make America Great Again” movement—its message, its enthusiasm and its cash.

Their grievances added to the sense of déjà vu. Gaetz and Greene assailed the deep state, Big Tech, socialists, antifa and prominent Republicans like Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan, who drew loud boos. The “undisputed leader of the Republican Party,” Gaetz declared, was the man three hours south at Mar-a-Lago.

Gaetz and Greene are among Trump’s staunchest loyalists. But their own controversies have largely relegated them to the fringes of the GOP. Gaetz was making his first high-profile public appearance since being embroiled in the investigation into whether he paid a 17-year-old for sex. (Gaetz has denied any wrongdoing.) Greene, who has promoted the QAnon conspiracy, dismissed mass shootings as “false flag” operations and voiced support for the execution of prominent Democrats, was stripped of her congressional assignments after taking office.

To the crowd in The Villages, none of that seemed to matter. Reality wasn’t what they were there for. They cheered the pair as they asked for prayers, thanked them for donations and shrugged off the hosts’ controversies as more evidence of efforts to silence conservatives.

Although they teased that Trump could be joining them in the future, Gaetz and Greene have yet to announce any further stops on the America First tour. But as the crowd filed out, spirits were high. “It was just so exciting—hundreds of people who love our country, all happy and singing, having a blast,” said Carrie Moore, 69, as she left with two friends. While they kept their Trump gear, they discarded the Gaetz and Greene signs that staffers had handed them on their way out the door.

—VERA BERGENGRUEN/THE VILLAGES, FLA.

## NEWS TICKER

### Biden green-lights major wind project

On May 11, the Biden Administration approved what will be the U.S.’s **first large-scale offshore wind farm**, which could generate power for up to 400,000 homes and businesses. The \$2.8 billion project will install turbines off the coast of Martha’s Vineyard, Mass., with construction set to start later this year.

### Afghanistan girls’ school bombed

Three explosions targeting a girls’ school in Kabul on May 8 **killed at least 85 people and wounded 147 more**, many of them teenage girls. The Taliban has denied responsibility for the blasts, which come as the U.S. begins its military withdrawal from the country after 20 years.

### Ga. shootings classified as hate crime

Prosecutors in Fulton County, Georgia, said the man accused of killing eight people in a series of shootings at Atlanta-area spas in March **targeted some victims because they were of Asian descent**, and classified the event as a hate crime. County District Attorney Fani Willis said she will pursue the death penalty.



# Milestones

## ATTACKED

### Colonial Pipeline

*U.S. oil flow held hostage*

THE LATEST IN A STRING OF HIGH-PROFILE INCIDENTS THAT have exposed critical vulnerabilities in America's infrastructure systems, a May 7 cyberattack on a major U.S. pipeline choked off the oil supply to much of the East Coast. The Colonial Pipeline, which sends more than 100 million gal. of fuel daily from Houston to New York, was forced to shut down operations after hackers penetrated its computer networks, leaving over a dozen states scrambling for gasoline, jet fuel and diesel.

The FBI has since traced the attack to DarkSide, a cybercrime gang based in Eastern Europe that's notorious for hacking into companies' systems, encrypting their files and extorting them to pay large ransoms to unlock the data. (In 2020 alone, \$350 million was paid out by the U.S. government for ransomware attacks, according to DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.)

The White House formed a task force to ensure greater flexibility in fuel transport until the problem was fixed. "The agencies across the government have acted quickly to mitigate any impact on our fuel supply," President Joe Biden said. Despite DarkSide's suspected links to Moscow, Biden did not directly blame the Kremlin, but said there was "evidence that the actors' ransomware is in Russia," and that "they have some responsibility to deal with this." —W.J. HENNIGAN



## DIED

### Olympia Dukakis

*An actor's actor and a coach*

By García

OLYMPIA DUKAKIS WAS TOUGH, BUT IT CAME from a place of believing in others' talent. And she was loved for her honesty. I would know, having worked with her filming the 2019 Netflix *Tales of the City* series and sitting in on her acting classes in college. In addition to her decades-long film career, including the *Look Who's Talking* movies, *Steel Magnolias* and an Oscar-winning performance in the 1987 rom-com *Moonstruck*, Dukakis, who died on May 1 at the age of 89, taught drama at New York University for more than 15 years. She never held back with sharing her wisdom—whether an acting tip or a note that my decision to once bleach my hair a terrible white-blond wasn't a great one—and I'm a better actor for it.

She played the role of Anna Madrigal, a trans woman, in four *Tales of the City* series, based on Armistead Maupin's classic novels. Madrigal was a character who'd made multiple hard decisions in her life but moved through turmoil with grace, hope and presence. To me, that was what Olympia embodied as a person. There are actresses who just walk into a room and they take up space, and she was one of them. —As told to SANYA MANSOOR

García is an actor



A Colonial Pipeline station facility in Pasadena, Texas

## DIED

Bo, the **Obama family's pet dog**, at age 12, on May 8, after a battle with cancer, the family said in a statement. > At least **nine people**, after a gunman opened fire at a school in the Russian town of

Kazan, on May 11. Officials have said a 19-year-old suspect is in custody.

## CANCELED

The **broadcast of the Golden Globes ceremony on NBC**, the network said May 10, amid controversy over the

awards' lack of diversity.

## CONCLUDED

A three-year-long **inquest into the 1971 killing of 10 people** during a British Army operation in Belfast. The report, released May 11, found

the victims were "entirely innocent."

## ELECTED

The Rev. Megan Rohrer, the first **openly trans person to be elected** bishop in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, on May 8.

## FAILED

A drug test, by 2021 **Kentucky Derby winner** Medina Spirit, shortly after winning, the colt's trainer confirmed on May 9.

## SENTENCED

Two American men, to life in prison, in Italy, on May 5, after being

found guilty of the 2019 **murder of an Italian police officer**.

## INDUCTED

Jay-Z, Tina Turner and the Foo Fighters, among others, into the **Rock and Roll Hall of Fame**, the organization announced May 12.



## Teens get their shot

By Alice Park

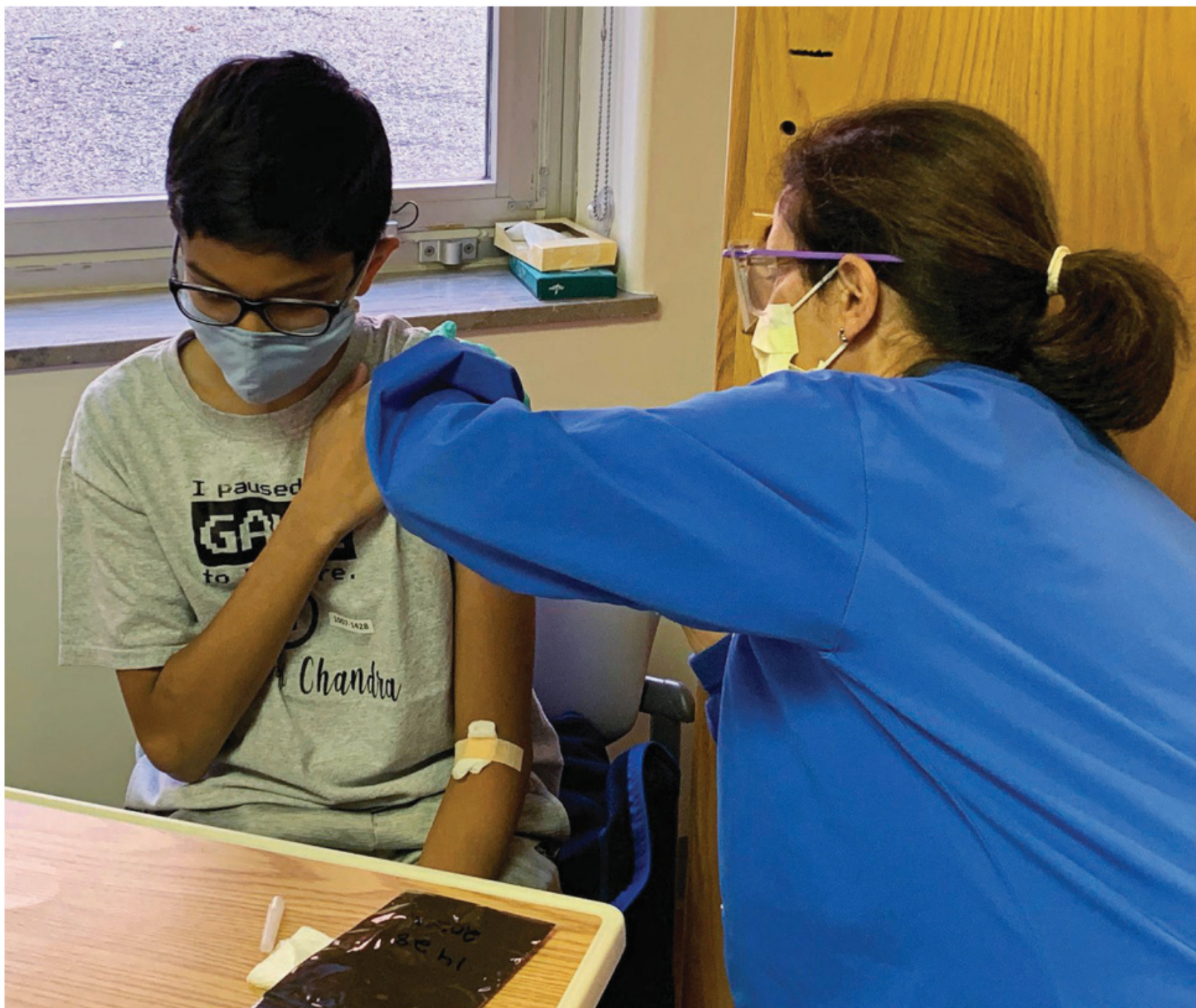
NOW THAT SENIORS AND ADULTS ARE getting vaccinated, it's the teens' turn. Adolescents ages 12 to 15 are the next people eligible to get the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 shot, says the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which recently extended authorization to this group. The vaccine becomes the first COVID-19 shot deemed safe and effective for this younger population. The agencies' decisions came after health officials reviewed data the two companies released in March showing that two doses of their vaccine provided similar protection from COVID-19 disease among adolescents as it did for adults. Among the more than 2,200 teens in the study group the FDA reviewed, only 16 developed COVID-19—and none were in the vaccinated group.

In fact, the research suggests that the vaccine may work even better in this age group than it does in those who are a few years older. The companies' studies found that levels of virus-fighting antibodies were on average higher among the 12- to 15-year-olds who got the vaccine than among vaccinated 16- to 25-year-olds in previous studies.

**THE FDA AUTHORIZATION** comes just in time for summer, as parents weigh whether it's safe to send their children to camp; it also lays the groundwork for a way to more safely open schools in the fall, assuming parents take their teens to get their shots. While younger children tend to experience milder forms of COVID-19, the disease can still trigger serious illness in some, especially those with underlying conditions like asthma and diabetes. Immunizing teens can help not only to protect them but also to extend the wall of human immunity that is essential for slowing the spread of the virus.

In some ways, this first authorization for a COVID-19 vaccine for children was the easy part. The hurdle now is to get those shots into arms. In a recent

**This first authorization was the easy part. The hurdle now is to get those shots into arms**



Abhinav, 12, participates in the study of Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccine at Cincinnati Children's Hospital

Kaiser Family Foundation survey, only about a third of parents of 12- to 15-year-olds said they would get their kids vaccinated; a quarter said they would wait and see how other children responded to the shot before deciding. Dr. Allison Messina, chief of infectious disease at Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital, hopes that when undecided parents see vaccinated children doing more of the activities they've missed over the past year, from sports to social gatherings, they will be more comfortable vaccinating their own kids. Some may not have much choice when it comes to getting their children back in the classroom: some universities are already requiring students to be immunized before returning to campus in the fall, and primary and secondary schools may follow suit to avoid outbreaks.

To make vaccination as easy as

possible for families, the Biden Administration plans to ship doses directly to pediatricians' offices, where many kids get their health care. To facilitate this plan, Pfizer-BioNTech is adding smaller shipment options of its shot to accommodate the needs of individual doctors' offices, which may require fewer doses than mass-vaccination sites.

Public-health experts say vaccinating teens will not only keep those who get the shot healthy but will also protect the only remaining group that's not yet eligible for vaccination—the youngest children in families. Studies on the safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines in children ages 6 months to 11 years are still ongoing. "If you can protect as many people as possible in the household, then you are also indirectly protecting those who cannot yet be vaccinated by providing fewer opportunities for the virus to come in," says Dr. Flor Munoz, a specialist in pediatric infectious disease at Texas Children's Hospital and Baylor College of Medicine. That applies on a much broader scale to the country as a whole: the more people vaccinated and able to ward off the virus, the fewer new infections the virus can seed, and the sooner the pandemic will wane. □





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## The pandemic creates a trash epidemic

By Alana Semuels

**A**CROSS THE COUNTRY, AS THE WEATHER improved and pandemic lockdowns were lifted, Americans ventured outside and noticed that their neighborhoods looked a little different.

A little ... dirtier.

They saw mattresses piled outside cemeteries and disposable masks clogging the gutters. Vacuum cleaners left in the woods, fast-food wrappers blowing on the highway, piles of tires. Neighborhoods that had been relatively clean before the pandemic were now full of litter. “There is garbage freaking everywhere,” says David Biderman, the executive director and CEO of the Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA).

In Portland, Ore., the city picked up more garbage in 2020 than in any other year on record: 3,000 tons, 50% more than in 2019. Additionally, requests to clean up trash and remove graffiti were up 300%. Norfolk, Va., is seeing “historic highs” in litter and illegal dumping, according to Sarah Sterzing, the education manager of Keep Norfolk Beautiful. Reports of illegal dumping to Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful were up 213% in 2020 over 2019.

There were 24 billion pieces of litter alongside highways and 26 billion pieces of litter along waterways in 2020, according to data compiled by the nonprofit litter-prevention group Keep America Beautiful and shared exclusively with TIME. While this is actually less litter than a similar survey counted in 2009, it does not include litter in places like public parks and neighborhoods, where pedestrians were most likely to exercise and socialize—think hikes, picnics and street parties—when the pandemic made it virtually impossible to take part in such activities indoors. Keep America Beautiful has received a number of complaints about litter shifting from downtowns to neighborhoods, says David Scott, senior director of research. As people shift to socializing outside, other countries, including the U.K., Canada and Jordan, are seeing a litter problem too.

**A FEW FACTORS** are driving the rise in trash. Budget cuts have forced some cities to reduce sanitation-department staff, which means fewer trash pickups. (In New Orleans, sales-tax declines led to cuts of 20% or more in some departments.) COVID-19 outbreaks have hit sanitation workers; Baltimore stopped collecting bulk trash and suspended street sweeping and cleaning of vacant lots because so many of its workers fell ill. Meanwhile, people are creating more residential garbage than in the past. They’re buying single-use personal protective equipment (PPE) like gloves and masks; Keep America Beautiful estimates there were about 207 million pieces of PPE litter on the ground at any given time in late 2020. They’re getting takeout from restaurants and throwing out their wrappers and plastic forks. The amount of residential waste that haulers are collecting is up 5% to 8% from the



▲  
Trash on a  
New York City  
sidewalk on  
Jan. 7

same time the previous year, according to SWANA. Although some of the increases in residential trash are offset by decreases in trash in commercial settings like office buildings, that isn't the case everywhere. In Ohio's Montgomery County, public waste was up 5.7% while commercial waste was down 0.6%, but the county still collected more waste in total than it did in 2019 or 2018.

But there's something else driving this trend toward trash. People seem to have given up on many things during their isolation. That includes cleaning up after themselves. “It's like, ‘Life sucks; I'll just throw this out the window,’” says Juliann Lehman, the director of Keep Gastonia Beautiful in North Carolina, where the city council recently doubled fines for littering because there's been such an increase. In February the state doubled fines for littering on highways. “We've all got these COVID bellies; you just kind of give up a little bit.”

THOMAS PRIOR





**3,000**

Number of tons of garbage the city of Portland, Ore., picked up in 2020, a 50% jump over 2019

**100**

Number of cities and towns that suspended recycling at some point during the pandemic, according to the Solid Waste Association of North America

**213%**

The increase in reports of illegal dumping to Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful in 2020, compared with 2019

**24 billion**

Number of pieces of litter picked up along the nation's highways in 2020, according to Keep America Beautiful

Once people leave a piece or two of trash on the ground, the behavior can quickly become contagious. “It’s simple human nature—you want to follow the rules, but if you see other people breaking them and not getting punished, you stop too,” says Robert H. Frank, a Cornell University economist and author of the book *Under the Influence: Putting Peer Pressure to Work*. “If you see a lot of trash strewn about, that makes you more likely to litter too.”

The behavior isn’t limited to litter. Illegal dumping has increased in a number of cities as people try to figure out how to dispose of things like tires or broken refrigerators without paying a fee. In Portland, that’s meant a bump in bulky waste around the city.

**PEOPLE ALSO STOPPED** being careful about how to dispose of their recycling during the pandemic. Recycling depends on haulers collecting and separating things like cardboard, glass and plastic so they can repackage and sell those items, but many recycling programs saw more contamination in their waste streams as people tried to recycle jars full of food or put clothes in the recycling instead of the trash. About one-third of recycling in Monterey, Calif., was contaminated in 2020, up from 22% the year before. Contamination increased by 41% in Indianapolis during the pandemic. About 100 cities and towns, including Montclair, N.J., and El Paso, Texas, suspended curbside recycling during the pandemic. Some, including Gastonia, N.C., suspended it because contamination was so high. Philadelphia collected 20% more trash in 2020 than in 2019, but 34% less recycling, according to the city’s streets department.

“We may be in a new place where there’s not necessarily the intestinal fortitude to take the extra effort to dispose of things in the right way,” says Brian Love, a professor at the University of Michigan who has looked at why recycling programs disappeared during the pandemic.

For some environmentalists, the

problem shows that individuals shouldn’t be expected to figure out how to dispose of goods once they’re done with them. They say manufacturers should be responsible for collecting products that are difficult to recycle or throw away, like paint or mattresses or plastic bags. “Without financial incentives and penalties that control waste generation and packaging production, excess waste and litter is the obvious result,” says Scott Cassel, the founder of the Product Stewardship Institute, a nonprofit that focuses on reducing the environmental impacts of consumer products. “We need to require producers to take greater responsibility for the packaging they put on the marketplace.”

Democrats introduced a bill on the House and Senate floors in March that aims to do just that. The Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act would require consumer brands to pay to collect and recycle waste left by their products. It would also impose a fee on carryout bags and require certain nonrecyclable single-use plastic products to be eliminated from the waste stream. A similar bill introduced last year did not make headway in Congress.

Keep America Beautiful is encouraging people to participate in the group’s Great American Cleanup, which connects volunteers to local trash-cleanup opportunities from March to June.

Local governments are still scrambling. South Carolina, which saw a “dramatic increase” in litter, is spending \$2 million a year for private contractors to clean its roads, the first time it has done so. (The state, like many others, had relied on prison labor to clean up litter but suspended that program because of the pandemic.)

As the litter problem in Portland worsened during the pandemic, city leaders figured the government couldn’t stop the dumping alone. The city raised \$100,000 from the private sector to launch a new cleanup initiative—and is seeking \$1 million more. □

**‘It’s like, “Life sucks; I’ll just throw this out the window.”’**

JULIANN LEHMAN,  
director, Keep Gastonia  
(N.C.) Beautiful



## Can Amtrak get rolling again?

By Patrick Lucas Austin

AS THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION SEEKS TO FIGHT climate change, encouraging train travel over emission-heavy alternatives like flying or driving could be one solution. But Amtrak, the country's major passenger rail service, has a reputation for slow service, delays and poor access. To help turn things around, President Joe Biden is proposing an \$80 billion investment in Amtrak as part of his American Jobs Plan. Could that be enough to get the country a true high-speed rail network?

Likely not. But Amtrak CEO William Flynn, who took charge of the semipublic for-profit operator last spring, has big plans regardless. Before the pandemic, Amtrak—which turned 50 years old on May 1—looked to be on the right track: it posted revenue of about \$3.5 billion in fiscal 2019, up nearly 3.5% year-over-year. But revenue crashed by nearly a third in 2020 amid the COVID-19 outbreak. After weathering the pandemic, Flynn's next job is to get Amtrak rolling again.

In an interview with *TIME*, Flynn says his priority is repairing existing infrastructure—primarily along the Northeast Corridor (NEC), which runs between Washington, D.C., and Boston and which carried 12.5 million passengers in 2019—while also increasing service. “The President talked about expanding intercity passenger rail across our country, and that’s something that we have a very clear plan and strategy for,” says Flynn.

**WHAT ABOUT HIGH-SPEED RAIL?** Amtrak's trains run at high speeds only along two stretches of the NEC, totaling 173 miles. Myriad non-Amtrak ultrafast projects are in the works in places like the Pacific Northwest, Texas and California, but none are near completion, and they could be scrapped.

For now, Amtrak is planning only minor speed upgrades. Improvements along the NEC will allow Amtrak's latest Acela trains to travel up to 160 m.p.h., but only along about 35 miles of track between Boston and New Haven, Conn. Amtrak says Acela trains generally operate at 100 m.p.h. to 135 m.p.h. across most of the NEC. By contrast, true high-speed rail systems in Europe and Asia reach up to 200 m.p.h. for long stretches of rail.

Still, Amtrak riders may be able to expect other improvements in the near future, like more frequent trains and service in new cities, including Chattanooga, Tenn., and Columbus, Ohio. A “large part of that growth,” says Flynn, “will occur on freight-rail infrastructure.”

It's easier to put more trains on existing lines



▲  
*Amtrak passengers disembark in Emeryville, Calif.*

than it is to build high-speed rail lines, which requires massive investments and land rights. But Amtrak trains running on freight lines are often delayed, as freight trains get priority. Moreover, the plan may have costs of its own, including the need for a “more sophisticated control system,” says Christopher Barkan, a professor at the University of Illinois and executive director of the Rail Transportation and Engineering Center.

At least one U.S. Representative is pushing the Biden Administration to think bigger. “If we just put more passenger trains on already congested freight lines, people are not going to leave their cars to ride the train,” says Congressman Seth Moulton, a Democrat from Massachusetts. In December, he introduced the American High-Speed Rail Act, a bill calling for an ambitious national high-speed rail system. It includes \$205 billion in federal investment and encourages public-private partnerships, a strategy that has worked in Japan and elsewhere. “Americans will ride the train if the service is better. That’s the bottom line,” says Moulton.

For now, Flynn is hoping that a more realistic strategy will help Amtrak find its way out of the pandemic and back into Americans' hearts—especially as vaccination continues and people feel increasingly comfortable traveling. “There’s so much latent capability in the existing structures that need, in some places, reinvestment where ... we can build out train schedules and services that you and I would want to take,” says Flynn. “That investment has to be key to the strategy, the national strategy.”



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## LightBox

### Deadly escalation

Family members of Palestinian children killed in an Israeli airstrike grieve at a hospital in Beit Hanoun, Gaza, on May 10. Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip killed at least 56 Palestinians, including 14 children, as of May 12, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health; rockets fired toward Israel by the militant group Hamas killed at least six people in Israel. The surge in violence came after weeks of protests in Jerusalem over the potential forced removal of Palestinian families from their homes in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. Israeli forces stormed the sacred Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem's Old City during evening prayers on May 10, and within 48 hours the conflict had escalated into the worst outbreak of violence in Israel since the 2014 Gaza war.

Photograph by Ali Jadallah—Anadolu Agency/Getty Images  
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# The View

TECHNOLOGY

## SETTING SOCIAL STANDARDS

By David French

Facebook's Oversight Board, a new, quasi-independent organization that acts as a kind of supreme court for the company, issued its most important decision yet. In a lengthy ruling, it determined that Facebook was "justified" when it suspended Donald Trump's Facebook and Instagram accounts on Jan. 6. ▶

### INSIDE

SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE  
IS BACK ON THE TABLE

RE-EVALUATING THE  
FREE MARKET

AN EXTROVERT AFOOT  
IN THE PANDEMIC



# TheView Opener

But the board went on to say that the company shouldn't have imposed an "indefinite suspension" on Trump. It then gave Facebook six months to "apply and justify a defined penalty."

In one sense, this decision is simply a straightforward application of Facebook rules and practices. Trump clearly violated Facebook's community standard on "dangerous individuals and organizations." Yet Facebook's "normal penalties" involve removing content, suspending an account for a defined period of time or imposing a permanent ban. If the Facebook user weren't named Donald Trump, the decision itself would be unremarkable.

But the board's reasoning was arguably more important than its outcome. The way it reached its decision may have far-reaching implications for other politicians and other "influencers." Put simply, the board is signaling to influencers that they should enjoy no privileges on the platform.

Much of the debate over the moderation of public figures on social media has centered on whether they should have special access. In other words, should Presidents be censored at all?

The argument against is often rooted in newsworthiness. Even when a President or political leader says things that might cause an ordinary user to be penalized, their words are still notable. Thus there's supposedly a public interest in hearing their speech even if they break the rules. Facebook has a specific "newsworthiness allowance" that allows content to remain up if Facebook deems the content "newsworthy and in the public interest."

The company, however, told the Oversight Board that it had not previously applied the allowance to content on Trump's accounts. It described yet another system, one involving a "cross check" system to some "high-profile" accounts to "minimize the risk of errors in enforcement."

The board was not reassured. "Unfortunately," it wrote, "the lack of transparency regarding these decisionmaking processes

appears to contribute to perceptions that the company may be unduly influenced by political or commercial considerations."

**FACEBOOK SHOULDN'T BE** more permissive for political leaders. While social media platforms are free to fashion their own moderation rules, creating a two-tiered online justice system that indulges the worst forms of speech—but only for the most powerful speakers—is not only unfair, it's dangerous.

The Oversight Board has now instructed Facebook to effectively put its thumb on the scale against the site's most powerful users. The board declared that "while the same rules should apply to all users, context matters when assessing the probability and imminence of harm." Thus, "when posts by influential users pose a high probability of imminent harm, Facebook should act quickly to enforce its rules."

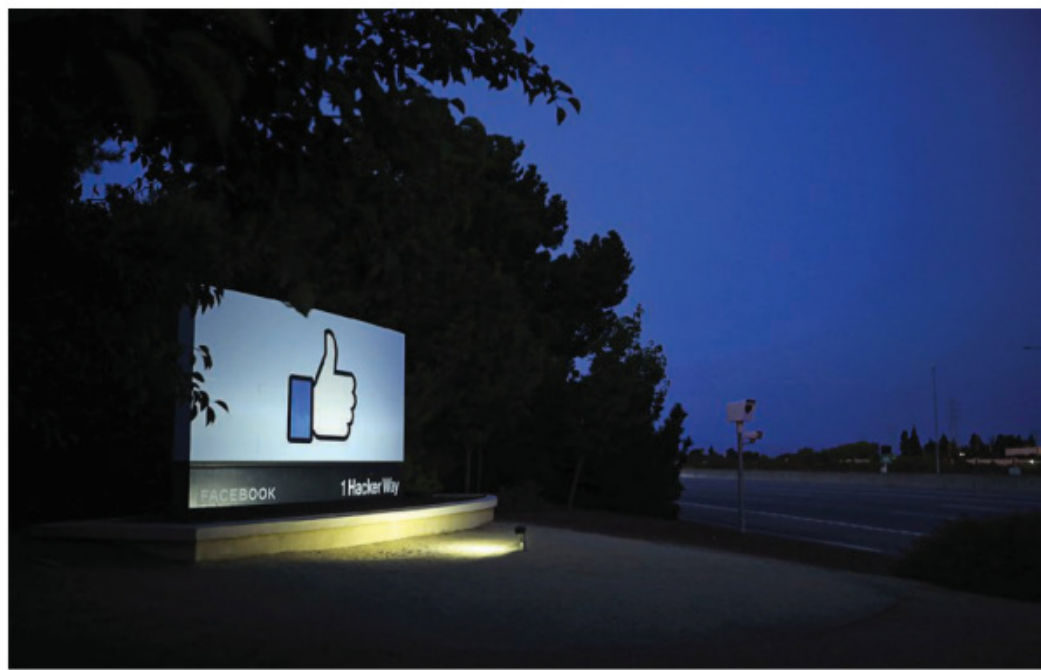
Though the First Amendment doesn't apply to the Oversight Board's decisions (it's a private board evaluating a private corporation), its reasoning is reminiscent of a Supreme Court case called *Brandenburg v. Ohio*. That case held that the gov-

ernment could prohibit speech advocating criminal conduct only if it is "directed to inciting or producing imminent lawless action" and is "likely to incite or produce such action."

Posts by influential users are far more likely to meet that test than posts by ordinary Americans. Thus their enhanced power should carry enhanced responsibility. But that enhanced responsibility should be imposed in an evenhanded manner.

The nation has learned a bitter lesson from Donald Trump. An American President can inspire an insurrection, and social media was indispensable to his treacherous aims. If Facebook can consistently apply the Oversight Board's guidance to influential users across the political spectrum, it will almost certainly cause leaders to think twice before using their immense platforms to inflict serious public harm.

*French is a columnist for TIME*



*Facebook must now determine whether it will allow Trump back on its platforms*

## SHORT READS

► Highlights  
from stories on  
[time.com/ideas](https://time.com/ideas)

### Remembering Mom after she gives birth

Celebrating the selflessness of mothers has a cost, writes Anna Malaika Tubbs, author of *The Three Mothers*.

**"I've spoken to many moms who initially struggled with motherhood largely because they felt that their needs were no longer a priority."**

### End police killings in Brazil

Police massacres are too common in Brazil, Rio de Janeiro congressman David Miranda wrote after a deadly raid.

**"There is no evidence that [President Jair] Bolsonaro encouraged this specific police operation, but the carnage is a perfect manifestation of the crime policies Bolsonaro has long sought."**

### Staying friends after divorce

Claire Fuller, author of *Unsettled Ground*, writes that she was angry and sad after she and her first husband split, but that slowly he became one of her best friends again.

**"It was possible to love my ex-husband in both the same and different ways."**



THE RISK REPORT

## The next step toward Scottish independence

By Ian Bremmer



FRESH OFF A SOLID victory in elections, the Scottish National Party's Nicola Sturgeon says another independence referendum for Scotland is now a matter of "when, not if." Her party fell one seat short of a majority in Scotland's parliament, but an alliance with pro-independence Greens will extend her run as Scotland's First Minister and sets up another vote on exiting the U.K.

Yet nothing is simple. First, though the U.K. looks to be turning a corner on COVID-19, there's still much to do to get people vaccinated, reopen Scotland and get the economy back on track. Throughout the campaign, Sturgeon insisted the pandemic would remain her priority until it was over, and the SNP's victory hasn't changed that. A referendum can't be staged until next spring at the very earliest.

Next complication: British law appears to require approval from Westminster, which depends on permission from U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson, to hold a binding independence vote, and Johnson isn't keen to become the man who lost Scotland. This is a question that's headed for court. The politics and timing are complex. For now, Scots appear evenly split on the question of independence. (They voted in 2014 to remain within the U.K. by a 10-point margin, but Brexit has shifted the landscape.) A majority of lawmakers recently elected in Scotland support independence; a slim majority of raw votes cast went to candidates who oppose it.

If Johnson insists that Scotland can't vote, the anger he'll arouse could shift support sharply in favor of breakaway. Whatever the law says, constitutional union depends on the consent of the governed. It might be wiser for Johnson to give the green light and hope for the best.

Then there's the question of Scotland's re-entering the European Union as

an independent nation. On this point, at least, it's clear what Scots want: in 2016, they voted 62% to 38% in favor of the U.K.'s remaining within the E.U. Nothing that's happened since then has dimmed the desire of most Scots for E.U. membership, which would be crucial for the economic well-being of a country of fewer than 6 million people. Scotland now sends 60% of its goods to the rest of the U.K. Regaining direct access to the E.U.'s 450 million consumers is a huge deal.

**AN INDEPENDENT SCOTLAND** would have big advantages in its membership bid. The most obvious is that Scotland was

a member of the E.U. for decades as part of the U.K. Legal and regulatory alignment would be far easier for Scotland than for candidates forced into major political and economic reforms. There's also at least one major roadblock. E.U. accession requires a unanimous vote of current members, and Spain, fighting Catalan separatism, has reason to make

things difficult for Scotland to avoid setting a dangerous precedent. That's probably a surmountable obstacle, but it would slow the E.U. approval process.

The biggest fight ahead for Scotland might be the process of divorcing the U.K. Think Brexit was complicated? The U.K. was part of the E.U. for 47 years. Scotland has been part of Britain for 314. There is no cut that will quickly set Scotland free, and the U.K. government, fearful of similar trends in Northern Ireland, has no incentive to make things easy.

All that said, Brexit taught us that secession votes aren't decided by careful cost-benefit analysis and close study of legal and regulatory implications. They are votes of the heart and declarations of identity. If a majority of Scots want to leave the U.K., independence will probably follow. It might be messy and take a decade or more, but this is the destination to which Scotland now appears headed. □

**Brexit taught us that secession votes aren't decided by careful cost-benefit analysis**

SOCIETY

## Kids need summer camp

With his American Families Plan, President Biden has proposed historic investment in education and childcare. But the plan also misses a big opportunity.

To prevent millions of kids from slipping back into isolation during the summer, when schools close again and many parents return to work, Biden should call for federally funded free day camp for all school-age children.

Implementing a free national summer camp would be more affordable than it might sound. We already have the land: public-school campuses, which could be kept open with federal support, and national parks and other landmarks, which could offer free entrance for camp programs. And the government could help expand slots for low-income families at camps that already exist.

Camp would provide academic enrichment as well as socio-emotional healing and growth. We need more than summer school. We need kids to be able to play, to be outdoors instead of behind screens.

—Nick Melvoin is a board member of the Los Angeles unified school district and a director at Camp Harmony, a camp for homeless and underserved children





## The free market is dead. What comes next?

By Chris Hughes

WHEN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC STRUCK, WORLD MARKETS came to a standstill. Governments around the world froze as much in-person economic activity as possible and opened their wallets to spend unprecedented sums of money to replace lost income. In the U.S., Republicans and Democrats agreed to invest record sums, nearly 20% of GDP. For the second time in 12 years, free markets had broken down, and government stepped up.

If the message wasn't clear before, it's now become impossible to miss: Government steps in when the going gets rough, ensuring that wealthy risk takers will be bailed out in the worst of times. Markets don't exist before the state does, and the state doesn't intervene in their natural work. But the state makes markets possible.

We are witnessing the most profound realignment in American political economy in nearly 40 years. President Ronald Reagan summed up the conventional wisdom that reigned from the mid-1970s onward in the U.S.: "Government is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem." Economists, policymakers and everyday Americans alike generally accepted that markets, unfettered and free, are the best way to create economic growth.

That ideology began to crack after the 2008–2009 Great Recession, and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic it has collapsed. The rise of ethno-nationalism on the right and democratic socialism on the left testifies to the growing disillusionment with the conventional wisdom on how government and economics are supposed to work.

Cross-partisan supermajorities of Americans want some of the biggest companies in America broken up, significantly higher minimum wages and a wealth tax on billionaires, and believe significantly more public investment is required to create economic growth.

We have had regulations, public investment and macro-economic management to varying degrees throughout American history. What makes this moment different is people across parties, classes and educational backgrounds are using a new framework to think about how we create prosperity.

**THERE ARE THREE KEY PILLARS** to a new, managed market approach: effective regulation, sizable public investment and careful macroeconomic supervision. A managed market requires centralized, accountable institutions embracing their power to create stable and competitive markets where innovation can flourish and labor shares in the wealth.

To help think about this new big picture, it helps to think small and look back to our history.

The oldest continuously operating farmers' market in the U.S., the Lancaster Central Market, is in the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch country. Local farmers started hauling their crops there in 1730, and today it still occupies the beautiful red brick building citizens built over a century ago in the center of the



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*The American Rescue Plan Act before its signing ceremony, at the U.S. Capitol on March 10*

charming downtown of Lancaster.

But the Lancaster Central Market hasn't survived through the centuries by luck or good fortune. The leaders of the market and of local government have tended to the market to help it flourish and grow. They have been guided by the same principles that can create broad-based American prosperity.

The market is carefully regulated today and has been through its history. Back in the 18th century, the state designated the market site, and participants selected a market clerk to help with its day-to-day administration. Zoom forward nearly 300 years, and the market continues to function similarly today. A market association agrees on rules to facilitate commerce, like the days and times it's open. It creates basic standards to ensure cleanliness and quality and that the goods are from small-scale sellers who act ethically and legally.

The Lancaster market is not an exception—everything from commercial malls to the NYSE relies on regulations to help create fairness and prosperity. When regulatory frameworks are clear and fairly applied, they engender a high level of trust and security for investors and consumers alike. Many institutions (like the SEC or FTC) already exist in

**The vast majority of Americans know that capitalism is not the problem—it's the variety of capitalism practiced**





Washington to regulate markets.

In addition to smart regulation, markets need public investment to flourish. In order to facilitate commerce at the Lancaster market, the local government had to invest. In 1889, the city built a large redbrick airy market house in response to the demands of vendors and business owners for protected indoor space. Once the physical infrastructure was in place, the cost of setting up a stand went down for the merchants and commerce could happen no matter the weather.

Similarly, a managed economy on a national scale needs public investment to flourish. When government invests in public goods like roads, airports, public transit, schools and solar panels, economic growth soars—just as it does when you put a roof over a farmer's market.

Finally, a managed market recognizes the need for the state to buffer shocks and surprises. When the growth of the suburbs and supermarkets threatened the viability of a central downtown market, local government in Lancaster stepped in to modernize the market, and a nonprofit managing the market helps ensure a balance of vendors that can serve the local community and tourists alike. Today, Amish women wearing tra-

ditional bonnets serve fresh-baked pies steps away from a stand of Middle Eastern foods and another selling mozzarella cheese made from local goat's milk.

At a national level, monetary and fiscal authorities employ macroeconomic policy to mitigate the blows of unexpected crises. Just last year in response to the pandemic, the Federal Reserve took rates to zero, restarted its bond-buying program and broke new ground by moving into corporate and municipal debt markets. Meanwhile, political leaders of both parties passed three emergency aid bills to keep tens of millions of Americans out of poverty and tens of thousands of businesses above water.

We have always used regulation, public investment and macroeconomic management to make our economy work, but we've done so sporadically and often weakly because we've told ourselves a different story about how the economy works. It's time for the story we tell to match the reality of economic growth—and to fully embrace the opportunity that creates.

**WE CAN LOOK** at shifting attitudes on childcare. Free-market orthodoxy told parents with young kids that they were on the hook to find and pay for affordable, safe childcare. A managed market outlook recognizes the obvious: cheap access to good childcare makes it easier for parents, particularly mothers, to join the labor force, boosting economic activity. In many cases, it also improves educational outcomes for their kids. Virtually all Democrats and almost three-quarters of Republicans support the idea of offering optional public pre-K to all 3- and 4-year-olds, and nearly half of Republicans go further and support universal childcare from birth to age 5.

Similar numbers of Republicans—alongside a significant majority of Democrats—support new thinking on student-loan debt. Free-market orthodoxy told college students that their only choice was to take out tens of thousands of dollars in debt to get a good education. A managed market outlook recognizes that when students are not burdened with massive amounts of student-loan debt, they invest their incomes in their families and homes. That creates more growth and a more educated public.

And across party lines, Americans want government to take a more active role in enforcing the nation's antitrust policies. Free-market orthodoxy told small-business owners that there was little the government could do to even the playing field unless they could conclusively prove massive corporations hiked prices on consumers after consolidating. A managed market outlook recognizes that antimonopoly policy is premised on reining in the abuse of market power and helping small businesses compete. Over 80% of voters say they are concerned about the impact that consolidation of big technology corporations in particular has had on small businesses, and 70% of Republicans support breaking them up.

The cross-partisan support for this new paradigm does not mean there are not deep, abiding differences between conservatives and progressives on policy matters. But it does offer hope for a new path forward, even on the role of race in American politics.

At a time of major racial reckoning, a new cohort of leaders is making a case for setting aside zero-sum thinking that suggests that progress for some Americans must come at a sizable cost for others. One of the most prominent leaders, scholar Heather McGhee, makes the case for a renewed commitment to creating abundant public goods—education, parks, infrastructure and care centers—open to all and with particular attention paid to ensure that people of color benefit.

The transition from one paradigm to another won't happen overnight. Many Americans still distrust government and don't hesitate to complain about its failures. But the vast majority of Americans know that capitalism is not the problem—it's the variety of capitalism that's been practiced over the past 40 years. When an accountable state effectively manages markets, those markets can create widely shared, stable prosperity. The challenge to come will be shaping the new common sense into a practical program to deliver on its promise.

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*Hughes is a co-chair of the Economic Security Project and a senior adviser at the Roosevelt Institute*



## The five people you meet in a pandemic

By Belinda Luscombe

I DID NOT START WALKING AROUND MY NEIGHBORHOOD TO meet people. I went outside for the same reason Pleistocene-era humans did: air, food, and cave fever. But I also did not start walking around my neighborhood to *not* meet people. I understood the necessity and luxury of working from home, but I dreaded the dreariness. There are only so many new places to set up your computer before you get bored enough to start talking to the Roomba. I needed to find humans. Not just faces on screens.

The year 2020 will go down as a tough one for people who were elderly, who were young, who were children, who were parents, who had parents, who were grandparents, who lived alone, who lived with others, who were married, who worked from home, who didn't work from home. But there's one other group whose difficulties should not be ignored: extroverts. For a start, extroverts hate being ignored. And second, it has been a big shock for us outgoing types; until the pandemic, society was set up to favor those who liked group work. Now our desire for human company can make us a menace.

Since I couldn't have people over, I went to them. I took my raging inner social butterfly and started to say hello to anyone in my vicinity. One of the first was the mailman. He has been our mailman for years, but his workday and mine overlapped, and I rarely saw him. Suddenly I was encountering him all the time, because a) the pandemic has led to more deliveries, b) we are more likely to be home when they arrive and c) getting the mail now counts as an adventure. After a while, I learned his name was Archimedes.

Basking in the joy of knowing someone with a name as redolent of human history as Archimedes got me through at least three more days of homebound humdrum. Unfortunately for Archimedes, my name is nowhere near as memorable, and Archimedes talks to dozens of customers a day, whereas I know only one mail carrier, and *his name is Archimedes*. Every time I see Archimedes on the street, I greet Archimedes like an old friend and ask about his (Archimedes') wife. Archimedes looks a bit stricken, as if he just got out of the bath and found me waiting there before discovering either how to measure density or where his towel was. I want to say to Archimedes, "Don't worry. You don't need to remember my name. I'm an extrovert, Archimedes."

**I LIVE IN A PART OF NEW YORK CITY** one writer recently described as "not a people place." Less residential neighborhood than busy commuter hub, it has been particularly hard hit by the shift to work-from-home. Every month a restaurant that used to rely on workers buying

lunch drops its gate for the last time: the fancy French-sounding bakery was the first to go, then several fast-casual outlets, the bar across the street, the Chinese takeout on the corner, eventually even pizza places and fast-food joints. Aside from the patisserie, I rarely frequented any of those establishments, yet I feel a twinge in my chest every time I see the padlocks. It's like heartache, except for a vendor. (Is there such a thing as mart-ache?) I mourn the staff, the signage, the squandered entrepreneurial energy.

Somehow, the local Indian restaurant has survived, staffed six days a week by a young guy named Ram. As our dining options narrowed, and his customer options narrowed, we began to see each other a lot. Ram now knows our order, that we will pick it up late and that we don't want flatware or napkins. But he also knows where we grew up, that we know a bit about cricket, that only one member of our family can tolerate spicy cooking. Recently he asked me for book recommendations, which either means business is even slower than I feared or we're getting to be pals. I want to ask him how he could possibly be earning enough from the restaurant when huge chains around him are getting the heck out of Dodge, but instead I just inquire if things are picking up. His answer is always the same: No, but we are hopeful they will soon. It's hard to know if I keep going there for the tikka masala, which is delicious, or the optimism, which is even more nourishing.

On one of my excursions to Ram, I met Kenny. I have probably walked past him at least 100 times in my life. He's the superintendent of a building nearby, and he lingers around his doorway a lot. I regret the many years I did not give Kenny much thought, because he's a lovely man with a beautiful spirit, but also because he's an unstoppable gossip and knows everything that happens on his turf. Were there suddenly a lot of

**I TOOK MY RAGING  
INNER SOCIAL  
BUTTERFLY AND  
STARTED TO SAY  
HELLO TO ANYONE  
IN MY VICINITY**





cops on the street? Kenny knows why. Did a store recently close down? Kenny will tell you how much the rent was hiked. Is there an unsightly stain on the sidewalk? Kenny will have the gory details. Kenny and I now have the kind of arguments you can only have with people in the flesh, because on social media you'd be dismissed as a Nazi/communist/journalist. Are bike lanes a scourge? Is the mayor a disaster? Does a local business have the right to put parking cones on the street outside its door? (He's wrong on all three.)

**UNLIKE KENNY**, who patrols a defined patch of ground, Elijah can be found up and down the street, sitting on his electric scooter, usually smoking. He lives in the building next door but often sits under the scaffolding on ours. Not everyone welcomed his presence at first, but it didn't take long to figure out what he was doing, that he was another member of the tribe extrovertia, bored in his apartment, looking for fellow humans with whom to mingle.

Elijah's front door is about 50 feet

from mine, but in many ways, he lives in a completely different world. He's a survivor: of a difficult childhood, of abandonment, of addiction, of incarceration, of many physical fights, of divorce and of Brugada syndrome, an arrhythmia that could take his life at any point. I'm a survivor of sneaker wedges, elementary-school auction committees and my son's discovery of men's cologne. I don't think I've ever met anyone who is as matter of fact as Elijah is about his mistakes and what they have cost, or so uncomplaining about the tough hand he has been dealt.

Elijah is as unfamiliar with my way of living as I am with his. He told me he never expected to live in a neighborhood with millionaires. "We're not *that* rich..." I started to say, then stopped. It's hard to explain my life to him, because all my complaints seem like gibberish. So we find other stuff to talk about. Elijah's love for Tom Brady is pure and strong and rivaled only by Gisele's, so I watched the most recent Super Bowl, even the parts between the commercials.

Many of the people I have met in the pandemic were familiar faces that I used to rush past in the morning to get to work and hurry by in the evenings to get home. But I also developed an unexpected rapport with this interesting young woman who lived in my house. I already knew her a bit, since I gave birth to her about two decades ago. She had left for college and had to return when the campuses closed. The child who moved out was perpetually indignant about something, usually me. The individual who moved back in was reasonable and charming and, astonishingly, sometimes laughed at my jokes. After a while I realized it was the same person. My parental fear and ambition had just temporarily clouded her from view—and perhaps skewed her perspective of me. She was not, after all, secretly intent on self-destruction, nor was she allergic to cleaning fluids, study or (microdoses of) advice. Occasionally, astonishingly, I laughed at her jokes too.

That's the weird thing about the people you meet during a pandemic. They've been there the whole time. □



Nation

# THE Balancing ACT

*Can Alejandro Mayorkas create a more humane law-enforcement agency?*

By **BRIAN BENNETT** and **ALANA ABRAMSON**

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IT WAS AROUND 4 A.M. ON APRIL 28 WHEN HOMELAND Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas jolted himself awake. As he lay in the dark, his mind locked onto the decision he had made the day before to limit the Trump-era practice of arresting and deporting undocumented immigrants who show up at local courthouses for legal proceedings.

Unable to sleep, he got out of bed, fired off an email about the politically sensitive move and then turned to the next conundrum. In the dark, he scanned the most recent data on how long unaccompanied minors were spending in Border Patrol custody, one of several onerous issues awaiting him in the day ahead. “There are times when I try to go back to bed, and there are times when I realize it’s not going to work,” Mayorkas says 3½ hours later over the engine noise of a Coast Guard Gulfstream jet, heading from Washington, D.C., to New York City’s La Guardia airport for a day of meetings. “This morning it wasn’t going to work.”

A veteran federal prosecutor and top immigration official, Mayorkas has handled ethically fraught law-enforcement issues for most of his adult life. But this is a new kind of pressure. He inherited the mess left by the Trump Administration’s anti-immigrant crusade: an estimated 1,000 children still separated from their families, 395,000 refugees waiting for word on their asylum requests, and a massive backlog of 1 million citizenship applications unprocessed. At the





*President Biden  
has charged  
Mayorkas with  
cleaning up a host  
of challenges left at  
DHS by the Trump  
Administration*



# Nation

same time, he faces a surge of new border crossers—the number of migrants trying to come to the U.S. has increased over 70% since President Biden took office and has reached a two-decade high. Then there's the continued business of enforcing the law, whether by cracking down on illegal immigration or deporting convicted criminals who've managed to slip in.

Immigration is just one of the difficult topics under his remit. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created after 9/11 by consolidating 22 federal agencies to prevent another terrorist attack, and running that conglomerate of bureaucracies has proved infamously unwieldy ever since. The third largest department in the federal government is charged with keeping bombs off planes, patrolling America's waterways, staffing border checkpoints, protecting the President, responding to natural disasters, ensuring U.S. elections aren't hacked and helping businesses defend against cyberattacks like the one on May 7 that temporarily shut down a pipeline that provides 45% of the East Coast's fuel. Doing all that amid the pandemic and the aftermath of the deadly Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol "is going to be an awful lot like juggling flaming torches," says Michael Chertoff, who headed the department from 2005 to 2009 under George W. Bush and supports Mayorkas' moves so far.

Biden's opponents aren't making it any easier. The Administration's current approach "sends a message to Central Americans that you can get in," says Mark Krikorian, head of the Center for Immigration Studies, a think tank that pushes for reducing legal immigration. Describing that as humane, as the Administration has, is "tendentious," Krikorian says. Polling suggests it's a hard issue for the Biden team, with more than half of Americans disapproving of his handling of the influx of migrants at the border. Republican strategists have been quick to capitalize on that, and GOP lawmakers travel to the border to draw attention to the issue.

Mayorkas' backers see him as the best candidate to help Biden achieve his goal of managing a broken immigration system through a mix of empathy and law enforcement. Mayorkas is the first immigrant and Latino to head the department and brings his lived experience as a Cuban refugee and son



*Mayorkas is escorted from the Brooklyn Navy Yard to La Guardia airport by the Coast Guard during his trip to New York City on April 28*

of a Holocaust survivor to the rollback of Donald Trump's most controversial policies. But DHS is still a law-enforcement agency at its core, and Biden picked him not for his personal history but because of his reputation for being a tough prosecutor, a senior White House official and a former top transition adviser tell TIME. How Mayorkas strikes the balance will define much about how the world sees America, and America sees itself, in the post-Trump moment.

**AFTER THE JET LANDS** at La Guardia, Mayorkas gets into a waiting SUV and heads across town to Lincoln Center, where 39 people from 21 different countries are waiting to take their oaths to become new U.S. citizens. For Mayorkas, presiding over naturalization ceremonies like this one is personal. Born in Havana

less than a year after Fidel Castro's communist takeover, Mayorkas was already a refugee by his first birthday. His father Charles, a gregarious Cuban whose parents were Turkish and Polish transplants, owned a steel-wool factory and expected to lose it in Castro's imminent nationalization of businesses. On Aug. 21, 1960, he and his wife Anita took a Pan American Airlines flight to Miami with 9-month-old Ali, as he's known by friends and colleagues, and his 3-year-old sister Cathy, part of a wave of nearly 250,000 Cubans who sought shelter in the U.S. from 1959 to 1962.

For Mayorkas' mother, it was her second time becoming a refugee. As fascism spread through Europe in the late 1930s, Anita and her parents escaped Romania for southern France. With Vichy France collaborating with the Nazis, they were blocked from escaping to the U.S. The family does not know the exact details, but at that time visas were hard to come by and immigrants had to prove they had enough money not to become a "public charge," or financial drain on the gov-





ernment. Anita and her parents sailed to Cuba on one of the last ships that escaping Jews were allowed to board, leaving France in 1941. The Nazis murdered her grandparents and several uncles left behind in Europe.

From Cuba, Mayorkas' family eventually settled in Beverly Hills, Calif., where their lives were not particularly glamorous. Mayorkas' father was a workaholic, says his sister Cathy, getting up at an "ungodly hour" to work at home before his job as a bookkeeper at a textile business, then staying up late to do the same. His mother, who spoke precise English in a lilting Romanian accent, became a teacher. Mayorkas graduated from Beverly Hills High School in 1977 and UC Berkeley in 1981 before earning his degree at Loyola Law School in 1985. After law school, he was drawn to public service as a prosecutor in the U.S. Attorney's office in Los Angeles. "It was an ethic instilled in me by my parents," Mayorkas tells TIME during an interview at DHS headquarters across the Anacostia River from the Capitol. "And also, quite frankly,

my family's life history drove me to that."

Mayorkas' ascent has not been without controversy. After President Obama nominated him to lead the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in 2009, whistle-blowers inside the agency alleged that he had fast-tracked visas for projects associated with former Senate majority leader Harry Reid, former Virginia governor Terry McAuliffe and Hillary Clinton's brother Tony Rodham. In 2015 the department's inspector general found no explicit evidence of wrongdoing but said Mayorkas' actions "created an appearance of favoritism and special access." Mayorkas denied the allegations. In February, he was confirmed as Secretary on a 56-43 Senate vote, one of the closest of Biden's Cabinet.

As he made his way across town in his SUV to the naturalization ceremony, Mayorkas revisited some of the hard calls he has made over the years. He described the politically risky decision to cut \$160 million from the operation costs of the immigration service in 2010 to help avoid raising citizenship-application fees from \$680 to \$727, the thinness of an immigrant family's budget a visceral memory of his own youth. Arriving minutes later at Lincoln Center, he walked across the plaza into a small auditorium, where he strikes up conversations with several dozen immigrants about to become citizens. "You will find, if you have not already, that this is indeed a country of tremendous opportunity," Mayorkas says, but "sometimes we do not live up to our highest ideals."

**WHEN MAYORKAS MOVED** into his office at DHS headquarters in early February, he placed a photo of his dad on his desk, frozen in the middle of an uproarious laugh at an outdoor party, a jubilant mood he never remembers seeing in his father when he was growing up. "He worked so unbelievably hard," Mayorkas says. He also stood on principle. "He was just straight to a fault," Mayorkas says. "I remember my mom saying, 'Do you have to tell your boss you don't like his idea, every time you don't like his idea?'"

One of Mayorkas' first law-and-order steps has been getting his own house in order. In March, he dismissed the department's entire advisory council, concluding that some of its members were

there to advance political agendas rather than offer policy expertise. He followed Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's lead in launching an internal investigation into domestic extremism within his own department. Other than reading about reports of social media profiles, he says, he has "no greater information" than what's in the public domain about this threat, but he says he has an obligation to "ensure that we do not have violent extremists within our ranks." On May 11, the department announced it was forming a Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships to further target domestic extremism.

Mayorkas' inclination toward enforcement is showing up in some of his policy decisions as well. After Lincoln Center, his next stop was a 1½-hour meeting with a dozen or so immigration attorneys and community leaders about how he can improve the treatment of people facing deportation. Mayorkas has asked for a complete overhaul of the guidelines used by Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers to determine whom to arrest and whom to deport. Several activists argued forcefully that immigration agents shouldn't consider criminal convictions when deciding whom to deport, given the stark racial disparities in American policing.

Mayorkas listened to the advice but afterward remained skeptical of the calls for a blanket pass on criminal histories. "I have a fundamental disagreement with some of their idealism," Mayorkas says of the advocates pushing for a broader overhaul. "They are talking about a system that is not grounded in the law." One individual, whose deportation case he recently reviewed, entered the U.S. illegally as an adult and has multiple felony sex-offense convictions. Not to deport that person, Mayorkas says, "would be a complete abdication."

If some dislike his prosecutor's instincts, however, others are more concerned about his humanitarian streak. One of the first Trump-era rules Mayorkas revoked was the "public-charge rule." Like the restrictions that had kept so many refugees like his mother out of the country during the Holocaust, this rule linked immigration status with financial self-sufficiency. He has reunited at least four families separated at the border under Trump,





*Mayorkas presides over a naturalization ceremony held at Lincoln Center in New York City on April 28*

though he declines to say when the rest of the 1,000 will be reunited. Breaking with the previous Administration's default position that keeping refugees out of the country was better for national security, he designated both Venezuelans and Burmese for temporary protected status. Mayorkas told *TIME* he was always in favor of allowing in up to 62,500 refugees, even when the White House initially kept the Trump-era level of 15,000, before raising it on May 3.

The hardest balancing act has been at the U.S.-Mexico border. Biden announced shortly after taking office that unlike Trump, he would not expel children who arrived alone. But legally, unaccompanied minors can remain in federal detention facilities for only up to 72 hours before being transferred to the care of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), where officials unite them with sponsors—usually relatives or foster families—while their cases are adjudicated. After Mayorkas was confirmed, he started to hear concerns from his staff that the

border detention facilities were beyond capacity. Children were staying longer than 72 hours, and HHS's promises to find additional beds in outside shelters had not materialized.

On a trip to the Rio Grande Valley on March 6, Mayorkas concluded that HHS needed help and, pressed by Biden in an Oval Office meeting four days later, promised to speed up the system. Within a week, he had directed FEMA to set up over a dozen emergency shelters for HHS that could house up to thousands of children. He deployed over 300 immigration staff to assist HHS with virtual case management to unite children with their sponsors and activated DHS's volunteer force to help children in shelters.

But by late March, images leaked of

children lying on mattresses on the floor under blankets resembling tinfoil in detention centers, causing an outcry. Immigration advocates lamented the crowded, appalling conditions. Republican critics alleged that the Biden Administration's decision to allow minors to stay in the U.S. had caused more children to come and that the White House was unprepared to deal with it.

Mayorkas' allies say it would have been much worse without the steps he took. The number of unaccompanied migrant children crossing the border decreased by 12% from March to April, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) figures show. The number of children in Border Patrol detention facilities has also decreased from 5,700 at the end of March to under 800 as of May 6, according to Administration officials, and these children now spend approximately 24 hours there on average, down from 139 at the beginning of April. "If it weren't for him driving this, we would still be looking at lines of kids in Border Patrol custody, in HHS





Later that day, Mayorkas visits a FEMA mass vaccination site at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn

custody,” a White House official says.

Mayorkas admits these are temporary solutions that don’t tackle the underlying problems. Even some Biden allies on the Hill are critical. “Trump overdid it, separating kids from families,” says Representative Henry Cuellar, a Democrat who represents parts of the Rio Grande Valley. “They’re trying to be humane at the border, but the pendulum has swung too much from the crazy stuff Trump did to another one where being humane means ‘Let’s not enforce the law in many ways.’” (DHS officials say they are following the law.)

Republicans are even more critical, alleging that Mayorkas’ systematic roll-back of Trump’s policies incentivizes illegal immigration, saying it both endangers migrants who have paid huge fees to smugglers to make the dangerous trek and compromises national security by allowing criminals to slip in. Earlier this year, CBP apprehended two Yemeni men crossing the border whose names appeared on a federal

terrorism watchlist. Indiana Senator Todd Young, the top Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Counterterrorism, has repeatedly prodded Mayorkas for more information about the threat posed by illegal entries that he says Mayorkas hasn’t provided. “Incidents like this remind us that a functionally open border poses a national security threat to the United States,” Young wrote to Mayorkas in May.

**JUST AFTER 2 P.M.** on Mayorkas’ day in New York, the Homeland Security Secretary decided it was time for lunch. The skyscrapers of Manhattan fell back as his black SUV drove across the Williamsburg Bridge to a popular Venezuelan arepas bar on Grand Street in Brooklyn. Tucking into a takeout box of green plantains, rice and

seared tilapia, Mayorkas spoke of his parents. If his dad was stoic, his mother was relentlessly positive—an “incredibly optimistic person,” his sister says, despite her family’s loss in the Holocaust. “My mom,” Mayorkas says, “given what she went through, was ‘Every day is a new one, something beautiful can happen, something tragic can happen, but every day is a new life, and therefore we have an obligation to be better today than we were yesterday and tomorrow than we are today.’ That was her.”

Mayorkas keeps a photo of her near the one of his jubilant, laughing father, at his desk in Anacostia, a reminder of her values. As he talks through the hard calls ahead, Mayorkas says that in the end, his mother’s philosophy is more deeply ingrained in how he wants to see the world—and run DHS. “I would tell people around the leadership table, ‘I am more of my mother’s son in that regard than my father’s,’” he says. —With reporting by MARIAH ESPADA/WASHINGTON



42° 50'E

42° 60'E

15° 30'N

15° 20'N

15° 10'N



4.8 MILES

A C A T A S T R



42° 70'E

42° 80'E

A SATELLITE IMAGE  
FROM JUNE 19,  
2020, SHOWS THE  
FSO SAFER OFF THE  
COAST OF YEMEN

Y E M E N

A RUSTING OIL-STORAGE  
TANKER OFF THE COAST  
OF YEMEN THREATENS  
+  
A HUMANITARIAN AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTER

O P H E W A I T I N G T O H A P P E N

BY JOSEPH HINCKS



# NOBODY KNOWS THE FSO SAFER LIKE AHMED KULAIB.



**DETERIORATION  
ON THE SHIP, SEEN  
IN EARLY 2019,  
HAS OCCURRED  
OVER THE YEARS,  
LEADING TO SMALL  
INCIDENTAL SPILLS**

The year he joined the Hunt Oil Co. as a loading master back in 1988 was the same year the Dallas-based oil producer installed a former oil tanker it had just converted into a floating oil storage and off-loading vessel (FSO) a few miles off the coast of Yemen. The 3.1 million-barrel-capacity ship received oil pumped from the hydrocarbon-rich fields of the country's Marib region, storing it at sea before it was off-loaded to export tankers.

The production-sharing agreement the Texans had with Yemen's government expired in 2005, leaving the Safer Exploration and Production Exploration Company (SEPOC) in control of the ship. For years, Kulaib rose through the ranks working beside the FSO *Safer's* 1,188-ft. iron hull. "I know her very well. I know her piece by piece," Kulaib tells *TIME* from Cairo, where he now lives. He speaks of the *Safer* with a paternal nostalgia. "She was a very good vessel at a certain time. But not today."

Kulaib was general manager at SEPOC in 2014, when members of the Shi'ite Houthi movement swept across northern Yemen and precipitated a civil war that continues to this day. Exasperated by the corruption and chaos that ensued, Kulaib left the country a few years later. His charge, the *Safer*, remains in place, umbilically joined to Yemen's Red Sea coast at the end of 4.8 miles of subsea pipeline.

The giant rusting ship has had virtually no maintenance since Kulaib departed. The sea chest valves that once fed its cooling system have rusted and can't be completely shut, he says. The ship's fire-

extinguishing system no longer functions. And power comes only from a small generator on deck that provides lighting and heat for a skeleton crew of SEPOC employees.

On May 27, 2020, a ruptured pipe caused seawater to flood the engine room. A repair job that under normal circumstances should have taken four hours ended up taking five days of nonstop work, according to an emergency case report seen by *TIME*. It took a team of local divers to seal the sea chests' external openings underwater. Only then could the SEPOC crew onboard patch up the damaged pipe in the sweltering engine room. Their repair job is just about holding, Kulaib says. More dangerous still is the oxygen that could be accumulating in the *Safer's* 34 oil tanks and mixing with volatile crude fumes because of inert gases' seeping out of corroded seals, he says. "Any spark, believe me, will end with a big explosion on that ship."

The consequences would be unfathomable. Estimated to hold 1.14 million barrels of crude (47.9 million gal.), the *Safer* could spill four times the amount of oil the *Exxon Valdez* leaked into Prince William Sound in 1989. And it would add another dimension of catastrophe to Yemen, a country already enduring the world's worst humanitarian crisis amid a six-year war that is only becoming more complex.

The precise impact of a disaster would depend on seasonal variations in weather and sea conditions, but the Geneva-based humanitarian agency ACAPS found that if the *Safer's* oil leaked





between April and June, it would affect 31,500 fishermen and 235,000 workers in fishing-related industries, and would likely shut down the vital port of Hodeida, the main entry point for a nation teetering on famine, for up to three months. Cleanup on such a spill would cost \$20 billion, according to ACAPS's projections, which U.K.-based consultancy RiskAware has modeled for the British government. That's almost the same as the entire GDP of Yemen in 2019.

A fire on board might be even worse. Up to 5.9 million people in Yemen and 1 million more in Saudi Arabia could be exposed to very high air-pollution levels—completely overwhelming a health care system already on its knees as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Some 500 sq km of Yemen's farmland would be covered in soot, causing crop losses for almost 10 million Yemenis and 1.5 million people in Saudi Arabia. If these worst-case scenarios come to pass, says Belal Al Mazwwda, an information analyst at ACAPS who worked on the projections, "it's going to be the biggest man-made oil-related disaster ever recorded, based on our estimation."

Yet despite the U.N. Environment Programme chief Inger Andersen's warning last year that "time is running out" to avert a "looming humanitarian, economic and environmental catastrophe," attempts by U.N. recovery teams to negotiate access to the FSO *Safer* with the Houthis who control it have repeatedly stalled.

For some, the *Safer*'s rotting mass is emblematic of the international community's inertia in the face of the six-year war. "They are trying to do the same thing over and over again," Raphael Veicht, Doctors Without Borders' head of mission in Yemen, says of negotiators in the U.N.-brokered peace talks. "They're not able to change the mediation mechanisms, they're not able to think out of the box and they're not able to come up with something new—and this just protracts the conflict."

It's hard to raise the alarm about a disaster that hasn't happened yet. But for an example of the cost of inaction, says Ian Ralby, a globally recognized expert in maritime law and security with the consultancy IR Consilium,

look no further than Beirut. In August, 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate exploded at the city's port, killing more than 200 people, despite Lebanese authorities having been forewarned of the risks the stockpile posed. Ralby sees history repeating itself on the FSO *Safer*. "It's a dangerous game to try to wait."

**BEFORE IT BECAME A UNIFIED COUNTRY** in 1990 under President Ali Abdullah Saleh, Yemen was split between the Yemen Arab Republic in the north and a People's Republic in the south allied with the Soviet Union. As President, Saleh spent his political capital consolidating power rather than uniting the country. Propped up by oil-rich monarchs in neighboring Saudi Arabia, Saleh's rule was blighted by corruption, poverty and inequality.

But after a month of street demonstrations toppled Tunisian dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011, many in Yemen saw an opportunity for their own "Jasmine Revolution." Following months of protest, and after he was wounded in a bomb blast at his presidential compound, Saleh left for Saudi Arabia where he handed over power to his Vice President, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. Yemen's pro-democracy movement began to pick up the pieces, but its work was undone by a "counterrevolution, regional conspiracy, a Saudi-Emirati war, and a coup funded by Iran," says journalist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Tawakkol Karman.

The coup was authored by the Houthis, who took control of the capital Sana'a in early 2015 and drove Hadi and his forces south. The war followed, when a Saudi-led coalition intervened with airstrikes on Houthi territory. However, its Operation Decisive Storm proved anything but. Of almost 23,000 airstrikes the coalition has conducted in the six years since—using U.S., British and French munitions—6,673 have targeted nonmilitary targets and 8,760 civilians have been killed, according to the Yemen Data Project. In February, President Biden used his first foreign policy speech to the State Department to announce that the U.S. would stop selling "offensive" weapons to Saudi Arabia for use in Yemen.

Although the conflict is frequently cast as a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and its archnemesis Iran, which has lent support to the Houthis, Yemen is in fact host to several messy wars within a war. The anti-Houthi forces are divided in their aims; the coalition includes separatist rebels in the south fighting the Saudi-backed government in Aden and United Arab Emirates-backed militias in the west, who are fighting among themselves. Then there are jihadist groups, including ISIS, targeted by controversial U.S. counterterrorism drone operations.

The country's civilians, starved of food and water, have paid the highest price. As of February 2021, 16 million people were going hungry, according to the U.N.'s humanitarian-affairs chief Mark Lowcock,



# World

“including 5 million who are just one step away from famine.” U.N. agencies have said at least 400,000 Yemeni children could die this year alone if conditions don’t improve.

A disaster on the FSO *Safer* would make things even worse. Already, 90% of Yemen’s food is imported. Some three-quarters of solid-food imports enter the country through the Houthi-controlled port of Hodeida. It is that port that the *Safer* now threatens, as well as the smaller port of Saleef nearby. The redirection of fuel and food imports to the southern port of Aden would pose acute challenges in a country whose civil war already severely impedes the movement of goods, and would lead to spikes in food and fuel prices, according to ACAPS’s projections.

But the conflict in Yemen also helps explain why so little has been done to address the ticking time bomb on its shores. The Houthis retain control of the ship and have repeatedly knocked back the international community’s attempts just to assess the state of the vessel, let alone extract the oil from it.

In August 2019, the U.N. had gotten as far as procuring a recovery vessel, stationed on the Djibouti coast. The night before it was supposed to depart, the de facto Houthi authorities withdrew permission.

In November 2020, the Houthis again agreed to allow a U.N. team to board the *Safer* for a month, to assess its condition and perform minor repairs. But the visit, which had been slated for February, had to be indefinitely postponed after the Houthis failed to sign off on mission plans. The major issue was the Houthi decision—later reversed—to “review” the mission in its entirety, which caused the U.N. to miss a deadline to rent a ship. “Negotiations have stalled over logistical issues like where the ship will drop anchor, though these seem close to resolution,” says a U.N. source familiar with the negotiations, who requested anonymity in order to speak freely. The issues now holding up the mission should not be deal breakers, the source adds.

But even before the latest attempt stalled, some experts were convinced the long-delayed U.N. assessment would never happen. “I give the U.N. mission less than a 1% chance of going ahead” says Ralby, the maritime-law expert, who has argued that the U.N. Security Council should authorize military action to resolve the crisis. “Even if the Houthis signed their agreements in blood, their track record shows that they will renege on that agreement before anything happens.”

Back in 2015 when the Houthis took over Sana’a, Kulaib says, they were eager to learn about how to export oil from the facility. “They wanted to get information about how we sell the cargo, how we produce, where the money is going, how much we sell for,” he says.

That never happened, and Kulaib says that op-



A PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED IMAGE OF A SEAWATER-PIPE LEAK IN THE ENGINE-ROOM COMPARTMENT IN MAY 2020

erationally, reviving exports from the *Safer* today is totally out of the question. Although the Houthis and even the U.N. team are talking about repair and maintenance, he says, “this can never happen. It’s not repairable. The engine room is already out and can never be repaired.”

If the *Safer* is fit only for the scrapyard, why do the Houthis block access to it? The likeliest answer: it’s a rare point of leverage for a movement with almost no allies. The Houthis are “using the environment and the livelihoods of hundreds, if not thousands of fishermen as a bargaining tool ... to blackmail the international community,” Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan told Saudi Arabia’s Arab News.

Saudi expressions of concern for Yemeni fishermen ring hollow: scores have been killed in coalition naval attacks. Still, the U.S. makes a similar argument. “Continued Houthi excuses and obstruction keeps [the U.N. team] from getting the job done,” a State Department spokesperson told TIME on April 16. “By politicizing the tanker, the Houthis risk inflicting more pain on the people of Yemen and creating massive environmental damage to the region.”

Mohamed Abdulsalam and Ahmed Al Shami, two Houthi officials contacted by TIME, did not respond to requests to discuss the state of negotiations or the safety of the SEPOC staff onboard the *Safer*. Publicly, Houthi officials have blamed the international community for the holdups, accusing the U.N. of

**‘ANY SPARK, BELIEVE ME, WILL END WITH A BIG EXPLOSION ON THAT SHIP.’**

—AHMED KULAIB

LEFT: COURTESY AHMED KULAIB; RIGHT: USED/REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM I.R. CONSILIUM



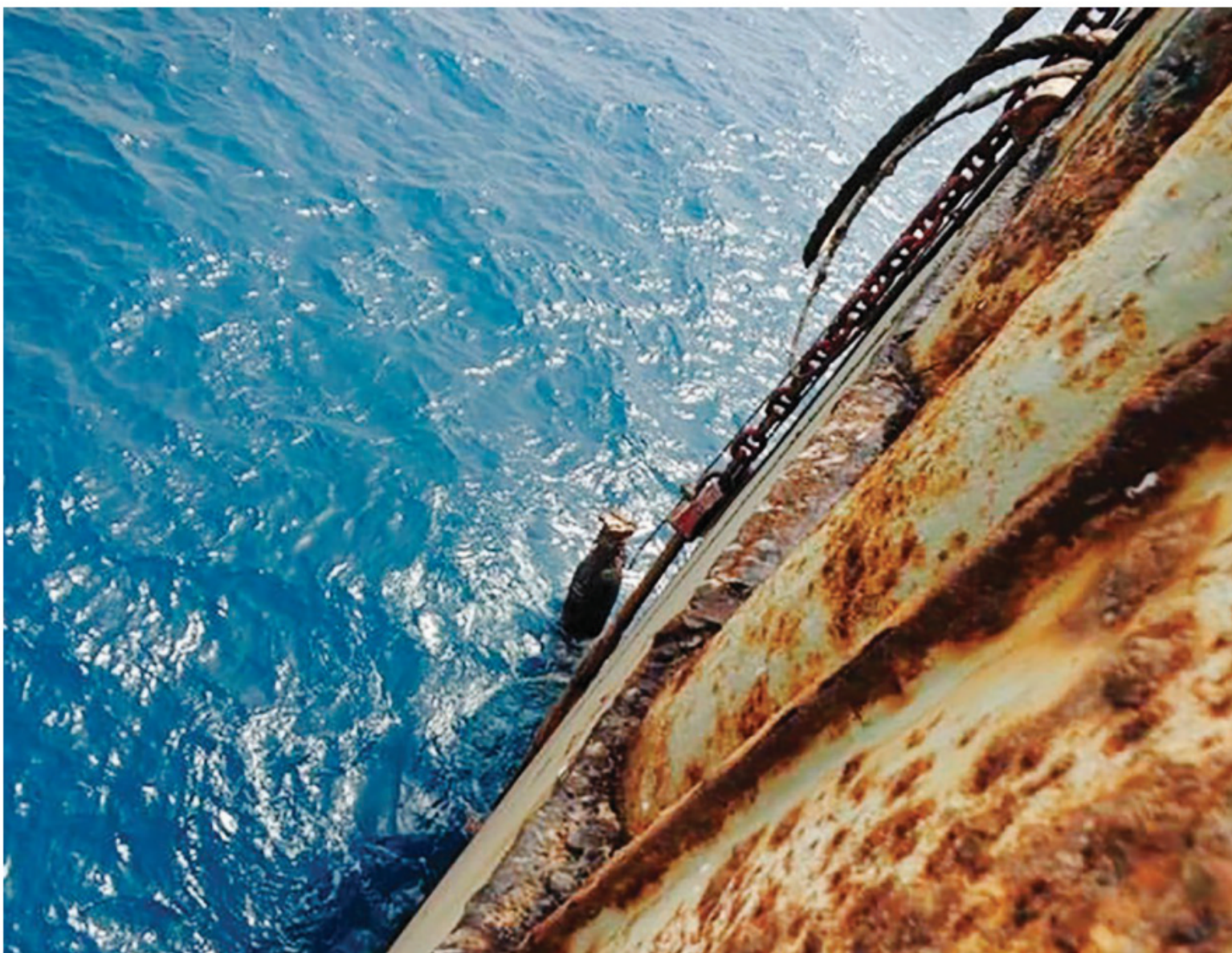
serving the interests of the movement's enemies.

"It has been proven to the world that their slogans are false and their move to serve the American, British, Saudi and Emirati aggression against the Republic of Yemen," Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a leader of the group, wrote on Twitter on April 4. "We reiterate that the United Nations will be held fully responsible for any leakage."

**IT'S DIFFICULT TO PICTURE** the sheer scale of a 1 million-barrel spill. When, according to Israeli officials, a formerly Libyan-owned tanker leaked 1,000 tons of crude into the Mediterranean in February 2021, it caused "one of the most severe ecological disasters to hit Israel," the Israel Nature and Parks Authority reported. And when Japan's *MV Wakashio* leaked 1,000 tons of heavy oil near Mauritius in August 2020, it blackened pristine beaches, exposed tens of thousands of cleanup volunteers to toxic pollutants, and was thought to be the cause of 50 dead dolphins and whales washing ashore, Greenpeace and local climate activists reported at the time. "If you add those two spills up, they're less than 1% of what we're talking about with the *Safer*," says Ralby.

As well as an immediate humanitarian disaster, it would cause a lasting environmental catastrophe. The Red Sea is one of the world's richest and most biodiverse marine ecosystems: home to endemic fish species, mangroves and the only coral reefs known to be resistant to sea-temperature rises. According to Yemeni NGO Green Dream, a *Safer* oil spill could impact 115 Yemeni islands in the Red Sea. It might also clog the

**A CORRODED PORTION OF THE TANKER'S SINGLE HULL IN APRIL 2019. ONE STEEL PLATE SEPARATES THE OIL ON BOARD FROM THE SEA**



Bab el Mandeb strait, the route to the Suez Canal through which up to 12% of global trade flows.

It was the Red Sea's extraordinary ecology that captivated Maoz Fine when his father first took him snorkeling as a child. A few steps into the water, Fine was plunged from the dull brown expanse of Israel's Negev Desert into a rich, colorful world. Even then, he says, "I was sure that this is what I wanted to study and understand."

Snorkeling led to scuba diving, and eventually a career in marine biology that took Fine to Australia's Great Barrier Reef. But it was his return home that launched the research for which he is now renowned. Expecting to witness the same heart-breaking bleaching patterns that had turned other reefs into lifeless undersea boneyards, Fine was struck by the fact the northern Red Sea corals remained as vibrant as he remembered.

Most corals have a bleach after a 1° or 2°C rise in sea temperature. But those in the northern Red Sea retain a sort of biological memory from their ancestors who migrated from warmer waters. Those Fine studied can tolerate a rise of up to 7°C. And with only 10% of coral reefs expected to still be alive by 2050, these super corals could prove crucial. They're the only ones "with an insurance policy to survive the next 50 years," says Fine.

But it could be void in the event of a spill. Most reefs are in the shallow waters near the coast, and would be slicked with oil during low tides. Because some chemicals in Marib Light—the oil on board the *Safer*—are water soluble, a spill would probably affect intertidal and deep-sea corals too.

That's the case even though the super corals are hundreds of miles north of Yemeni waters. Viviane Menezes, a marine scientist at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in Massachusetts, has described the Red Sea as being like a "big lagoon" with "everything connected." An oil spill at any time of year would be disastrous, she says, but seasonally variable weather and tidal patterns make contingency planning difficult. In the summer, Red Sea currents would drag an oil slick south, threatening Eritrea and Djibouti, and potentially entering the Gulf of Aden. In winter, circular currents would swirl more of the oil north.

The winter scenario poses a particular threat to Saudi Arabia, where desalination plants dot the coastline from the southern city of Jizan near Yemen's border up to the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba, which separates Saudi Arabia from Egypt. So acute is the kingdom's dependence on desalinated water, which accounts for roughly half of its requirements, that in 2018, the state-run Saudi Saline Water Conversion Corporation commissioned nine new plants along the Red Sea coast.

"The risk is real. One can only look at previous oil spills at the Persian Gulf (or Arabian Gulf) and



Israel, which have resulted in a shutdown of several coastal desalination plants in the past,” says Manal Shehabi, an expert on oil economies in the Gulf at Oxford University’s Institute for Energy Studies. In 2017, a pipeline spill of 100 cu m of oil in the Israeli city of Ashdod forced the three-day closure of three of the five desalination plants that supply 75% of Israel’s water. That’s only a fraction of the total volume of oil on board the *Safer*. “Given the country’s dependence on desalinated water ... a leak of sizable amounts could actually cause a serious threat to national water supply, let alone the environment,” Shehabi says.

**BUT AS WITH THE WAR**, the people who stand to be worst affected by a spill are Yemeni civilians. Every day after dawn prayers, Akram and seven friends and relatives hoist his skiff across the beach at Al Khokha, and into the Red Sea. Some days Akram, who is being identified by a pseudonym to protect his safety, says he returns to shore by sunset, his boat laden with *jalebi* fish, mackerel and grouper for the auction in town. On other occasions, he’s forced to stay at sea for an entire week. For moonless nights, he tells TIME through an interpreter, “we bring with us a small generator and flashlights to help us keep fishing until the morning.”

It was once possible here to make a hard-scrabble living from fishing, which was Yemen’s third largest export industry before the war. But since 2015, it has become increasingly perilous. There’s constant harassment from Eritrean coast guards, emboldened by Yemen’s lack of government oversight. Fuel, food and equipment prices are through the roof, and the roadblocks and travel restrictions lengthen the time it takes to get fish to market, forcing fishermen to cut their prices.

Then there are the mortal dangers. “Warships make it difficult for us to move. We are not allowed to reach many islands, since they’re considered military. And now there are sea mines everywhere,” says Akram, “but it is our only source of income. Either we die from the mines or from hunger.”

Around a third of the population along this strip of the Red Sea coast has been displaced, some multiple times. Large parts of the population do not have access to primary or secondary health care, and the only commodities that make it from the coast to northern Yemen are fish and small quantities of red onions. At some points the front line is so close to the coastal road that trucks are forced to drive for miles along the beach. There, fishermen like Akram continue to ply their trade despite the risks.

## LARGEST SHIPPING OIL SPILLS IN THE PAST 25 YEARS

(IN TONS)

11k

Tanker *Hebei*,  
South Korea, 2008

20k

*Erika*, France,  
1999

63k

*Prestige* tanker,  
Portugal, 2002

72k

MV *Sea Empress*, U.K.,  
1996

113k

*Suezmax Sanchi*,  
China, 2018

150k

Potential  
FSO *Safer*  
spill

SOURCE: ITOPF

One oil-spill scenario that RiskAware modeled for the British government in 2020 shows the entirety of fisheries on Yemen’s Red Sea coast inundated, representing a \$1.5 billion loss in income over 25 years. Veicht says if poverty forces people to fish no matter how paltry the catch, “then we have to deal with the poison. It’s just a horror scenario.”

Along the Red Sea coast there is no visible mitigation taking place, says Veicht. “There is no preparation, no contingency planning, no protective measures going on at all.”

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is one of few international NGOs that work with artisanal fishing communities in the area. Among other initiatives, the humanitarian agency has helped rebuild fish landing sites, markets and fish-testing centers damaged as a result of Yemen’s civil war. It provides cash loans to fishermen blocked from accessing fishing grounds, and equipment to help repair their nets and skiffs.

Although a spill at the *Safer* would undermine that work completely, aid workers say it’s simply too big and too political an issue for them to address. “I don’t think anyone in the humanitarian sector is ready to deal with a disaster of that proportion,” says NRC’s Yemen-based spokesperson Sultana Begum. “We’re underfunded, we’re overstretched and we’re constantly fighting fires.”

Still, she adds, calls for the U.N. Security Council to authorize military action are “the worst possible” recommendation. Says Begum: “Yemen doesn’t need any more military action. The ongoing negotiations are very sensitive. Something like that would destroy everything and make it harder to provide aid and keep people safe.”

For the SEPOC employees on the ship, there’s neither aid nor safety. The onboard contingent has been whittled down from a peak of 100 when the ship was operational to a skeleton crew of seven or eight. They are monitored around the clock by a squadron of Houthi militants “who don’t know about hydrocarbons,” Kulaib says. “They only know how to use the guns.”

Occasionally, a chartered fishing boat visits the *Safer*, bringing food, spare parts and drums of diesel for the generator. And about every month, the crew gets shore leave and is replaced by a new staff rotation. “All confirm that the disaster is imminent,” wrote engineer in charge Yasser Al Quatabi in the May 2020 emergency case report seen by TIME, “but when it will exactly happen, Allah alone knows that.”

—With reporting by ALKHATAB ALRAWHANI/CAIRO and MADELINE ROACHE/LONDON □



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Business



# HOW JUUL GOT Vaporized

Lawsuits and federal regulators  
may force the vaping behemoth  
to confront its troubled past

BY JAMIE DUCHARME

PHOTOGRAPH BY GABRIELA BHASKAR



# Business

ON JUNE 7, NORTH CAROLINA ATTORNEY GENERAL JOSH STEIN will enter a Durham courtroom with a mission: proving that the e-cigarette company Juul Labs purposely targeted teenagers with its nicotine-rich products.

If Stein—who in 2019 became the first state attorney general in the U.S. to sue Juul—is successful, the vaping company may be in for a world of hurt. Hundreds of lawsuits against Juul, many of which were consolidated into multidistrict litigation in California, are pushing allegations mirroring Stein’s. They claim Juul purposely designed its stylish, flash-drive-like devices and flavored nicotine e-liquids to appeal to teenagers. The product launched with a flashy marketing campaign that, the complaints argue, was likewise meant to appeal to young people. The suits allege Juul planted the seeds for a youth addiction epidemic that would make nicotine cool again after years of historic declines in cigarette smoking.

Juul’s executives have repeatedly denied that they meant to attract children; they say their goal has always been to give adult smokers a better option than deadly combustible cigarettes. To their credit, most health experts agree that e-cigarettes—while not full-stop safe—are less dangerous than cigarettes. And Juul, with a sleek design and satisfying nicotine delivery, could be particularly appealing to adult smokers looking to switch. Whether Juul meant to attract them or not, though, millions of teenagers have used its products. In 2020, about 20% of high school students and 5% of middle-school students said they had vaped some sort of e-cigarette in the past month. Those figures are down from 27.5% and 10.5%, respectively, in 2019—rates high enough to prompt sweeping regulations on e-cigarettes.

In late 2019, the Trump Administration raised the legal tobacco purchase age to 21. Days later, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) banned many flavored vaping products that could appeal to teenagers. The FDA, which recently announced an impending ban on menthol-flavored combustible cigarettes and flavored cigars, is currently deciding whether to continue allowing the sale of e-cigarette products in the U.S.—and for teen favorites like Juul, data around youth vaping could be the nail in the coffin.

How could things have gone so wrong for a company founded by two Stanford students who said they wanted to make cigarettes obsolete? The fall from grace began in June 2015, when Juul was just a promising innovation from a startup called Pax Labs. Juul’s launch, almost six years to the day before the company will stand trial in a North Carolina courtroom, marked both its beginning and the beginning of its end.

**JUUL VAPORIZERS WERE EVERYWHERE.** Stacks of the slim devices littered every surface, lying there free for the taking—which people were doing happily, grabbing them and exhaling plumes of sweet-smelling vapor.

Juul’s June 2015 launch party was held at Jack Studios, a giant industrial loft space in Manhattan often used for fashion photo shoots, with striking views of the city skyline and the Hudson River below. Guests could pose for photos in front of a multi-colored triangle pattern, drawn from Juul’s first ad campaign, Vaporized. The Vaporized campaign was fun and colorful, full of fresh-faced models dressed in trendy clothes flirting with the camera and posing against colorful backdrops.



Student and Juul at the University of Georgia

Drinks were flowing from the open bar, and every guest left with plenty of Juul swag. The events team hired buzzy DJs Phantogram and May Kwok, and *Top Chef* winner Ilan Hall handled catering. Marley Kate, the photographer who’d shot the Vaporized campaign, took photos of guests, which were then projected onto the loft’s walls as live art. The best shots had a chance at appearing on the company’s Times Square billboard.

The goal was for cool New York City socialites to be seen pulling on Juul vaporizers. The company had specifically chosen to launch Juul in New York City and Los Angeles, two trendsetting cities full of influencers and journalists who, according to a company marketing document released in 2019 by a congressional subcommittee, could help build buzz.

Pax—the parent company that made and marketed Juul products—had spent much of its marketing budget on advertisements that appeared in convenience stores and other retail spaces, as well as on the Times Square billboard and in a print ad that appeared in *Vice*, which called itself part of the “#1 youth media company in the world.” But social media marketing was valuable to the scrappy startup too, in no small part because it was cheap. If influencers were seen using the Juul, their followers would want to try it. And once their followers tried it, they would

PREVIOUS SPREAD: THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX; THIS SPREAD: MELISSA GOLDEN—REDUX





post about it and tell their friends. But this social media marketing strategy, unlike most utilized by startups, hinged on promoting an age-restricted and highly addictive nicotine product on platforms beloved by teenagers.

To get the word of mouth flowing, Pax hired Grit Creative Group, a marketing agency that called itself “an authority on millennial culture,” to secure influencer guests for the Juul launch party. In addition, a network of nearly 300 New York and Los Angeles influencers would be gifted free Juul products over the coming weeks. On the list were movie star Leonardo DiCaprio (who had already been photographed vaping other e-cigarettes), and model Bella Hadid. At the time Juul launched, in June 2015, Hadid had almost a million Instagram followers—and, at 19, was only barely able to legally purchase an e-cigarette in most states.

Giving launch-party guests the chance to pose for a professional photographer, and potentially appear on a Times Square billboard, was a brilliant viral marketing move. After the party, social media were awash in photos of young, attractive people holding drinks and puffing on Juuls, their photos hashtagged #Vaporized and #LightsCameraVapor. Juul’s official accounts posted some photos too. “Having way too much fun at the #JUUL launch party,” read one tweet from Juul’s

handle, right above a photo of five fashionably dressed young women pouting for the camera. “The party was a resounding success (at least in my mind) in terms of winning over the cool kids,” one employee wrote afterward in an email to chief operating officer Scott Dunlap; the email was later included in the multi-district litigation against Juul, initial trials for which are set to begin next year.

Juul didn’t stop at one great party. After that night at Jack Studios, it set off on a six-month “sampling tour” concentrated in urban areas. Juul-branded shipping containers popped up at concerts, clubs and rooftop bars, beckoning people inside with bright colors and the promise of free products. The cargo containers featured a lounge area; an “animated GIF booth” where people could pose for the camera; and a “flavor bar” where guests could try tobacco, mint, fruit or crème brûlée Juul pods.

People liked what they saw. “@juul-vapor is the best, most satisfying #ecig I’ve ever tried. Great product! Only \$50 too!” one customer tweeted a few days after the product launched. “Juul has won me over in just a week,” a blogger wrote on the site Engadget, marveling that after he’d smoked for 14 years, Juul had helped him dramatically cut down on cigarettes. Even the mainstream press was noticing. A *Wired* profile proclaimed Juul possibly “the first great e-cig.”

But some of the social media posts coming in after sampling events made certain executives uneasy. “I would catch myself saying, ‘Wow, they look really young,’” former COO Dunlap told the *New York Times*. “But you don’t really know. It’s social media after all, where everyone is their younger, idealized selves.”

Shortly after the product launched, *Ad Age* published an article in which a spokesperson from the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids voiced concerns about Juul’s marketing appealing to kids. “We’re seeing more and more irresponsible marketing of unregulated products such as e-cigarettes,” the spokesperson said. “We are concerned any time a new product or new advertising campaign goes public regarding cigarettes and tobacco and their addictive nicotine.”

The story was a wake-up call. “We were like, ‘Oh my God, that’s terrible,’” says a source involved in the launch

campaign, who wished to remain anonymous because they were not authorized to speak about their time at the company. Company executives insist they didn’t want their products to appeal to kids, or even to be perceived as appealing to kids. The Vaporized campaign had been in the world for only a short time, but already Pax executives were realizing it could sink the company before it swam.

In July 2015, just a month after Juul officially launched, Pax investor Alexander Asseily began to get very vocal about his concerns, according to documents included in a legal complaint filed by the Hawaii attorney general in 2020 and currently moving through pretrial hearings. If the company kept marketing in ways that could be seen as targeting kids, Pax was going to get lumped in with Big Tobacco, an industry infamous for preying on young people with its marketing. “We will continue to have plenty of agitation if we don’t come to terms with the fact that these substances are almost irretrievably connected to the sh-ttiest companies and practices in the history of business,” Asseily wrote in an email to board members included in the Hawaii legal complaint. “It’s not about faking it—it’s about doing it correctly ... which could mean not doing a lot of things we thought we would do like putting young people in our poster ads or drafting in the wake of big players in the market.”

Shortly after, Asseily began brainstorming with chief marketing officer Richard Mumby about what the company could do differently. They kicked around ideas like a program through which smokers could turn in their cigarette packs or subpar vaping products in exchange for discounts on Juul products. It would “send the only message that’s needed,” Asseily wrote in an email to members of the leadership team included in the multi-district litigation complaint. “Juul is a superior alternative to conventional smoking and mediocre vaping products.”

That idea never got off the ground, but it was clear something had to change. Mumby began working on a replacement for the campaign he had only just launched, one that people within the company hoped would have no appeal to—or even the perception of an appeal to—kids. The new concept would have a more muted color scheme and focus on



# Business

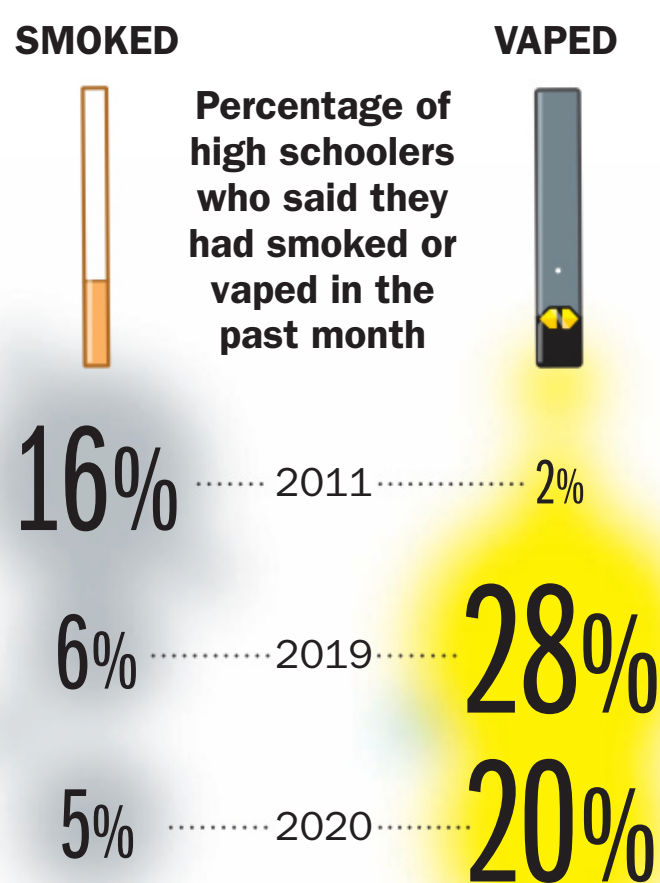
shots of the product itself rather than on models. Some of the Vaporized ads were pulled immediately, even before the new spots were ready.

While this was happening, however, the Juul brand was beginning to spread, slowly but surely, on social media and online. If parents had known what Juul was back then, they probably would have been appalled. But the device was so new, and looked so much like a flash drive, that they might not have known that what their children were actually seeing as they scrolled through social feeds on their phones was an addictive e-cigarette. And even if they did know what Juul was, they almost certainly wouldn't have known how much nicotine it contained. That ingredient was disclosed only at the very bottom of the ad, in tiny print. Besides, the eye was drawn to other words. JUUL, the ads read in huge block letters. VAPORIZED.

**MATTHEW MYERS**, president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, watched uneasily as this unfolded. When he saw Juul's ads, all he could think of were old cigarette ads. They ticked the same boxes: young, fun models selling sex, sophistication and a good time. "As somebody who's worked in this field and looked at cigarette industry behavior too long," Myers says, "the instant reaction is: Juul is replicating the 1950s and 1960s playbook from the cigarette companies." Pax executives may have said Juul was for adult smokers only, but to Myers, their actions didn't match their words.

Juul's Vaporized campaign came out amid a spirited debate in the public-health world. In 2015, the World Health Organization commissioned a report that warned e-cigarettes might damage the lungs and expose users to carcinogens. The same year, Public Health England, an agency sponsored by England's Department of Health and Social Care, declared in a highly publicized report that thanks to their lower levels of carcinogens and harmful chemicals, e-cigarettes were 95% safer than combustible cigarettes. It was difficult figuring out what to believe, but the antivaping crowd had at least one leg up: it could always bring the conversation back to Big Tobacco, especially as Pax and other companies made dubious marketing decisions like Vaporized.

Many people, like Myers, saw history repeating itself in Juul's Vaporized campaign. Big Tobacco had lied to the public and targeted teenagers for decades; if it looked like vaping companies were following in their footsteps, e-cigarettes suddenly came out looking a bit more sinister. No matter how deeply scientists believed in tobacco-harm reduction, there was little they could do to defend themselves when e-cigarette brands were lumped in with Big Tobacco. "When we push back against [anti-e-cigarette rhetoric], we sound like we're defending the tobacco industry," laments Raymond Niaura, a tobacco dependence and treatment expert at New York University who supports the use of e-cigarettes.



SOURCE: CDC

Pax executives should have known about these dynamics and designed a launch campaign that had no possible link to Big Tobacco. But the promise of future growth seemed to trump historical caution. "They had the Silicon Valley mindset of 'We're a tech company; we're not a tobacco company,'" says Gregory Conley, president of the American Vaping Association. "And so, they hired very, very few people with experience in tobacco" early on. If they had, Conley says, they might have had on staff people able to see where things were going, who would have never let a campaign with even a chance of drawing comparisons to Big Tobacco end up on a billboard in Times Square.

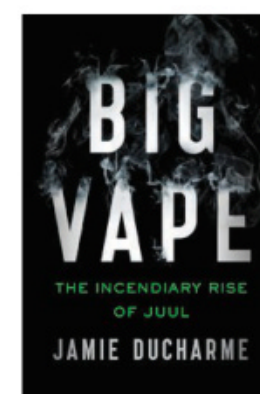
Instead, the comparisons to cigarette

ads and the allegations of targeting teenagers clouded Juul's reputation right from the very beginning—even more so as teen vaping rates soared and Juul gobbled up market share. To this day, health experts and antivaping advocates often point to Juul's ill-fated Vaporized campaign as evidence that it purposely hooked teenagers and engineered a brand-new addiction.

For years, that allegation mostly amounted to bad press. Now, though, Juul may be in for its most serious threats yet. The outcome of Stein's lawsuit in North Carolina could set a precedent for the hundreds of other pending cases against Juul, filed by school districts, individuals and attorneys general from states including Massachusetts, California, Colorado, Hawaii and Minnesota.

Beyond that, the outcome in North Carolina could color the FDA's impending decision on e-cigarette products like Juul. After years of allowing e-cigarettes to be sold without formal FDA approval, the agency is now sifting through applications from hundreds of companies trying to prove their products can help protect public health, the benchmark they must meet to stay on the U.S. market. Vaping products' popularity among teenagers is likely to be a strike against many manufacturers—so if a state attorney general can prove that Juul purposely lured underage customers, the aggressive regulators of the Biden Administration's FDA could find that too large a red flag to ignore. E-cigarette makers like Juul may be next on the FDA's chopping block, particularly if the company's past comes back to haunt it.

Juul's supporters argue too much attention has been paid to a single advertising campaign that ran for only a few months and, the company contends, made little impact on Juul's sales. But as the saying goes, you don't get a second chance at a first impression. If Juul had a target on its back in the years that have followed, it was only because it put one there with its early, unforced error. And now, lawyers like North Carolina's Stein are shooting for a bull's-eye.



*Adapted from Ducharme's book, Big Vape: The Incendiary Rise of Juul, out May 25*





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# Essay

# BABY *Steps*

LEARNING TO PARENT IN PUBLIC  
AFTER A YEAR IN OUR COZY CAVE

*By Rebekah Taussig*

I AM A DIFFERENT PERSON NOW THAN I WAS WHEN this pandemic started. I don't just mean that I've stopped wearing makeup and started wearing leggings as my work-and-play uniform, although, yes, that too. Everything feels different because I went into the pandemic with a cute baby bump and the habit of sleeping through the night, and somewhere in there and with very few witnesses, I transformed into an actual mom.

A year after my son was born, I still am somewhat shocked to hold this title. I am now and forever will be someone's mom! It's an adjustment that I'm sure feels massive for most parents, regardless of whether their babies were born during a pandemic, but for me, much of the surprise is a result of having very little experience seeing parents who look like me.

I am a disabled mom. More specifically, I am a mom with paralyzed legs who uses a wheelchair to get most places. Before I found out I was pregnant, the idea that I would be a parent felt as likely and terrifying as taking a trek to outer space in a homemade rocket. And it would seem I'm not the only one with this lack of imagination. I don't think a doctor had a serious conversation with me about the option to

have a baby until I was 33 years old. Before then, my questions were usually dismissed. "We won't know until we know," I heard again and again.

One of the great losses of having a baby during a pandemic was not getting to share him with the world. I took hundreds of pictures of him—on a lemon-print blanket, on his changing pad, on his dad's chest—and texted them to everyone I knew, so eager for others to witness his rolls and wrinkles. But sheltering at home gave us something too. It provided privacy for me to figure out the mechanics of motherhood from my seated position. I was allowed to ease into the role without much scrutiny or unwelcome feedback. It took time and practice to figure out our rhythms; I learned to lift him from the floor to my lap, in and out of his crib, up and over the baby gate—all without an audience.

**THE FIRST TIME** I took Otto to one of his doctor's appointments by myself, when he was three weeks old, I was nervous. It was one of my first experiences occupying the role of mother in public. I pulled our car into the parking garage, lifted him out of his car seat and bundled him into his wrap. He curled into

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JESS T. DUGAN FOR TIME



*The author  
breastfeeds her  
son, Otto, in their  
home in April*





# Essay

my belly. I pushed us toward the hospital, where a valet stood at her post by the front doors.

As soon as we exited the garage, I felt her eyes on me. I can't know what she was thinking—maybe I reminded her of someone, or maybe she'd just remembered she'd forgotten to pick up milk at the store. Whatever the meaning behind her expression, it didn't change the way her unrelenting gaze made me feel as we glided by her, as if she expected me to drop my baby onto the concrete at any moment. I willed myself to exude the confidence I'd started gathering at home. I knew what I was doing. He was safe with me.

She watched us every foot of our journey, craning her neck to monitor us until we disappeared inside. Our smooth entrance into the hospital didn't seem to reassure her of my abilities; she glowered at us again as we returned to the garage after Otto's checkup. In fact, her surveillance became the bookends to all of his appointments. Each time, I made it back to our car shaken.

Not every encounter with strangers felt sinister. Some were nice, like when people in elevators chuckled over Otto's expressive eyebrows sitting beneath his bright red hat with a green stem shooting out the top, and we got to explain that it was his "Tom-Otto" hat knitted by one of my students. Some moments were puzzling, like the first time we took Otto to a park—my partner Micah pushing him in a stroller and I rolling beside—and a woman passing us looked at Otto and nodded toward me. "Does she ever give you a ride in that thing?" she asked. I paused, perplexed. Did she imagine me as the family dog, fulfilling the singular role of an animated plaything for my son? Some responses to us were kindly meant, like when the sanitary workers loading our garbage onto their truck saw me transfer Otto into the car and applauded as if I'd stuck the landing on a triple axel while holding him up by my pinky. By that point, the ritual had become an ordinary dance for us, albeit a tad elaborate. Were we really such a spectacle?

Regardless of intent, every moment we spent in public sat atop a fraught history I couldn't ignore. Disabled people have faced barriers to adoption, lost custody, been coerced and forced into sterilization, and been pressured to terminate pregnancies. This legacy of fighting to be seen as trustworthy and deserving parents curled around the edges of my every interaction. Who here doubted my ability to keep my son safe? Who was looking for signs of my neglect? Every moment with onlookers was a moment I had something to prove. Even imagining an afternoon at the park made my body tense.

All we needed, I tried to convince Otto, were the comforts of our cozy cave where we could tune out the spectators and pretend our bubble was the whole universe. As long as we had Dad, FaceTime, takeout and daily bubble baths, we were set. Why risk being misjudged when we could escape notice altogether?

Otto disagreed, vehemently, faster than I knew babies could have opinions. He developed a high-pitched screech like a teakettle announcing its boiling point that was quelled only by leaving the confines of our little house. For months, he clamored for the great wide world like an angsty Disney princess. The spark behind his morning eyes made me think he'd like to twirl under an open sky and sing with strangers at the market.

The first time he sat in a room with his cousin Sam—hardly more than a baby himself—Otto erupted in giggles we'd never heard from him. He tilted his head to the side and scooted right up to Sam, not more than a few inches from his face—"Are you real?" he seemed to ask. He'd cup his hand against Sam's cheek, the joy hitting him in waves. Sam held very still, eyes wide, bewildered by the focused

attention. The moment was sweet, but a pang of vulnerability rose in my chest. Instinctually, I thought, "Don't love so hard! You might not be loved back!" Otto didn't know to gauge Sam's reaction. He didn't realize Sam wasn't reciprocating.

**MY BABY IS PULLING US** out of our cocoon and willing us out into the world. Part of me wants him to lap it up—to feel the bustle of a crowd on the edge of a parade, to smell the mix of sunscreen and chlorine at the public pool, to hear a room fill with

the sound of people singing. But Otto doesn't understand that seeing the world means being seen back. He doesn't know the feeling of being inspected, evaluated, misunderstood. He doesn't know how awkward and uncomfortable it can feel to be humans together. He doesn't know the worry of saying the wrong thing, wearing the wrong thing, being the wrong thing. How do I teach him to be brave? To hold on to himself when the opinions of others are loud and everywhere? To know what risks are worth taking? To protect himself? How can I teach him even one thing, if I haven't figured it out for myself yet?

As my brain circles the risks and rewards of leaving the house, as I talk with my friends, as I read Twitter, I realize I am not the only one feeling trepidation about re-entering the arena. So many of us have experienced a pocket of space to exist without observation for the first time in our lives, and it's changed us—it's given us the chance to experiment with gender expression, to relax into our own bodies,

*How do I teach him  
to be brave? To  
hold on to himself  
when the opinions  
of others are loud  
and everywhere?*



^  
*The author  
and her  
family have  
started a  
tradition of  
giving each  
other a flood  
of kisses on  
their way out  
the door*





to practice a different relationship with work. How do we protect those newly discovered parts of ourselves as we return to some kind of normal? It feels like an unprecedented problem, but in some ways, these are the same questions we've been asking since the start of this pandemic. How do we keep ourselves safe and also stay connected? The threat might have a different shape, but the tension between the desire and the dilemma feels familiar.

A few months into the pandemic, my mom initiated a weekly family Zoom. Every Tuesday afternoon, she and my sisters and I synched up on one screen for two hours. There was no agenda or obligation. Sometimes we were late or in the car or at the park. Sometimes we had to stay on mute the entire time because a baby was crying in the background (Oh hello, Otto!), but we continued to show up, week after week. We vented and soothed, lamented and advised, grieved and rallied.

One Tuesday afternoon, as I geared up for another of Otto's doctor's appointments, I released the valve holding back my anxiety about the valet's persistent scrutiny. The enormous dread I felt in anticipation of these short walks from the garage to the hospital

was getting worse. I would lie awake the nights leading up to the appointment, replaying the memory of being watched, trying to imagine the thoughts running through her head as she glared at us, worrying that this next time would be the time Otto would cry. And then what would she do?

I shared this with my family across the screen, throat tight, tears brimming. As soon as I said it out loud, I couldn't believe I hadn't brought it to them earlier. Just the relief of hearing them hear it made the experience feel smaller. They affirmed my abilities, validated the stress and felt it all with me. The next morning, as I pulled into the familiar parking garage, my phone buzzed with texts. "We're with you!" they said. Their solidarity created a buffer around me as I pulled Otto from his car seat, strapped him to my chest and pushed us toward the hospital. That shield is what I remember most about that morning.

**AS OTTO AND I** take our first cautious steps into the world together, I wish I could keep our bubble wrapped around us, grow calluses and not care when people stare, become impenetrable. But I don't think this is a problem I can solve entirely on my own. As the pandemic crystallized for us, we are inextricably linked. We can only do so much to protect ourselves on our own; we're much safer when we prioritize the health of the whole community. I think of all we did to protect each other this past year—staying home when we could, wearing masks, maintaining distance to keep all of us safe. Not everyone, of course. I don't live in the land of unicorns and sparkle dust. But many of us learned to forge pockets of refuge for one another in the midst of the threat.

Watching this collaborative rallying makes me wonder what else we can build with these new skills we learned out in the wild. Can we re-create that same practice of care for our emotional well-beings? What would it look like to make space for each other to have changed? To reunite without expectation that anything has to look or sound or move or be the way it was before? To go into a day remembering—in our bodies—just how much risk it takes to show up at all, let alone to go against the grain?

Micah, Otto and I have started a tradition before we leave the house each day. We pause by the door, gather in a little triangle huddle and give each other a torrent of kisses. Almost like an incantation of protection, a practice of softness. I hope we are teaching Otto to be brave and also kind; to hold on to himself in all of the noise and to hold space for other people; to take the good risks and offer others a soft place to land; to create boundaries and respect others' limits.

We aren't starting from scratch. We know how to do this.

---

*Taussig is the author of **Sitting Pretty: The View From My Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body***



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# Pick up a tool

AMERICANS ARE REPEATING AN OLD PATTERN—TALKING ABOUT RACIAL INEQUALITY BUT DOING LITTLE TO SOLVE IT

BY JANELL ROSS

IN 1937, THE CARNEGIE CORPORATION hired a Swedish man to unravel an American quandary. The foundation had a history of funding initiatives to help the disadvantaged; in the U.S., where enslavement was only 72 years gone, the disadvantaged were disproportionately Black. The issue was often described as, simply, “the Negro Problem.”

But while it was clear that the problem existed, it was also obvious how difficult it was to solve. And so the foundation brought in economist, sociologist and future Nobel Prize winner Gunnar Myrdal to gather information to guide its programs.

Myrdal did much more. Almost seven years later, he produced a two-volume study he dubbed *An American Dilemma*, exploring, in statistical detail, the evidence of the great American lie—the gap between the nation’s ideals and its racial reality. Myrdal was far from the first to try to illuminate the effects of ongoing institutional racism, the frequent and extreme way it pushed the U.S. away from its core ideals and constitutional promises. And he certainly would not be the last. Alexis de Tocqueville in 1835, W.E.B. Du Bois in 1900 and again in 1935 and the Kerner Commission in 1968, among others, enriched our national understanding of troubles we still face today. But Myrdal and his army of social scientists seemed, for at least a time, to cut through America’s fairy-tale understanding of itself. The study was one of just a few credited with prompting the Supreme Court to put a legal end to school segregation.

And yet, once again, Myrdal’s subject looms large. The profoundly inadequate question of whether America is a racist country has caused a wave in many elected officials’ deep-as-a-puddle meditations on the nation’s history. Many Americans remain ill informed

about race and near delusional in their description of its reach. The evidence is clear—and was, in a way that all but only the most recalcitrant can deny, made plain again in the extended endurance test that began in March 2020.

If the past year has been, as is so often claimed, the one in which the ugly scar of American inequality ripped open so wide that few could deny it, it should also be known as the year when a bold and opportunistic set learned to better talk the talk of needed change. Still, even in a country that prides itself on allowing citizens to speak freely and then act to change public policy accordingly, the renewed attention given to racial injustice has scarcely been matched with parallel action.

The problem is as clear as ever. What America is going to do about it is not.

**THE SAME BASIC INFORMATION** is the backdrop of Myrdal’s work and everything that came before and after. In a country founded on a commitment to equality, white Americans have been the only ones to consistently enjoy the full measure of citizenship. Settlers drove Native Americans from their own lands and then treated them as unwelcome, dangerous guests. Congress barred many others from even entering the country. But it was Black Americans whom the nation enslaved, then so completely marooned that in every major measure of social, economic or physical well-being, millions would—and still do—remain far behind their white compatriots.

When Myrdal’s work was published, Black Americans earned less, were more likely to be unemployed, and led shorter and unhealthier lives. In the North, their housing was crowded and substandard. In the South, many did not have access to anything beyond basic elementary education. Most Black Americans could not vote or borrow

the funds to buy property. “Virtually the whole range” of public amenities, from hospitals to libraries, were “much poorer for Negroes than they are for whites,” Myrdal wrote. The majority of Black Americans had little to no assets and were the targets of disproportionate incarceration and exploitative profit-making schemes.

Nearly 80 years later, we find ourselves more than a year into a pandemic, a recession and a reconsidering of the meaning of Black death caused by agents of the state. Last summer’s mass protests have for the most part receded. But increased crime, increased poverty, increased death and increased distress have not. Yet in our litany of collective aches, there is almost no arena in which Black Americans have not suffered more than white Americans.

Black Americans on average earn less with the same (or, in some categories, more) education than white workers, are more likely to be unemployed and are clustered in industries hit hard by the pandemic. Black Americans are more likely to be born premature and to die younger. In fact, life expectancy for a Black boy born in 2020 is a full seven years shorter than a white boy’s. Black women remain more likely to die in or just after childbirth than white women. All Black Americans are more likely to die of cancer than white Americans. The impact of the coronavirus was anything but novel: the death risk for Black Americans is almost two times that of white Americans.

It doesn’t stop there. Black children remain more likely than white ones to attend high-need, low-performing schools, low-quality preschools, and high schools that offer few if any college-prep courses. The Black homeownership rate in the first quarter of 2021 was 29 percentage points lower than that of white Americans. When Black





ARTWORK BY VINCENT VALDEZ: THE ROPE (AFTER MARSDEN HARTLEY), OIL PASTEL/PAPER | 2018



Americans do own homes, those properties are often undervalued by appraisers. That disparity—not saving, spending or even earnings—drives the bulk of the nation’s massive Black-white wealth gap. Black Americans are also more likely to live in “nature”-deprived areas than white Americans and experience more exposure to pollutants. Black incarceration rates continue to outpace those for all other groups, and the effort to restrict Black voter participation, which has been a part of American politics since Reconstruction, has resurged today.

And yet, just as was the case when Myrdal was working, many of those in power have the temerity to express total shock about those vast racial disparities, to confuse the causes of inequality with its effects, and to question what, exactly, is wrong with Black Americans. Or Latino Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans—take your pick. As distinct as the Black experience is, so many communities throughout the U.S. have their own parallel set of facts.

These problems are not products of the long pandemic. But many were made worse, and perhaps the copious concern about being “woke” to inequality (or deeply opposed to anything like it) has hitched a fast ride on the virus to the cultural forefront. Corporations that only years ago reached massive settlements with the U.S. government for engaging in what federal officials alleged was widespread discrimination have released carefully worded statements declaring that Black lives matter. Promises have been made. They will have to be tracked. In the interim, the *Dear Black, Latino, Asian employees, we see you and feel your pain* email after a horrible event in the news has become a new genre of corporate communication. The very same impulse is also a feature of a certain set’s social media feeds and the launching point for thousands of online lists of goods created by people of color, to be bought by those who wish to understand themselves as good.

But even among those white Americans who do not live in a state of denial, the call to action has once again grown faint, if it was ever there at all. Few companies have been so public in discussing how employees involved in unfair practices might actually be penalized,

or how the obligation to operate with equity in mind will be prioritized above profits. Few organizations or individuals have acknowledged outright that they have engaged in racist practices, or explained how they plan to stop. There aren’t many parents willing to stop arranging their housing around the pursuit of “good schools”—thinly veiled code for white schools—or wealthy people ready to admit the racial consequences of opposing higher taxes on investment earnings. After the nation’s so-called reckoning, to which those who claimed to have awakened brought PowerPoint presentations and brochures, few have stayed behind to fold and stack the chairs.

## LAST SUMMER’S MASS PROTESTS HAVE MOSTLY RECEDED. BUT INCREASED CRIME, INCREASED POVERTY, INCREASED DEATH AND INCREASED DISTRESS HAVE NOT

**IT IS NOT TRUE** that, as the most exhausted among us sometimes assert, nothing has changed. But as the optimistic Myrdal saw in 1944, yet had a hard time putting bluntly, America is not about the business of doing things much differently. When the New Deal reoriented Americans’ relationships to their government, officials south of the Mason-Dixon Line made sure that most of the jobs done by Black Americans were excluded from the new Social Security system. Program administrators barred Black Americans from meaningful access to the homeownership and education programs that ensconced millions of white Americans in the middle class.

In his study, Myrdal found ample proof of Black ingenuity, creativity and grit, producing lives of multidimensional joy and peril. All that’s still there. But

perhaps today’s list of dangerous inequities wouldn’t run quite so long or, in some cases, have come to envelop other groups, if sustained action had been taken in response to his findings—something he believed possible. “It is true the average white American does not want to sacrifice much himself in order to improve the living condition of Negroes,” he wrote. “But on this point, the American creed is quite clear and explicit.”

Myrdal died in 1987. He did not live to see the new and creative ways that Americans have developed of telling lies. And he was not immune to the same maladies. Myrdal was optimistic about the nation and dubious about whether Black Americans were equipped to function as full citizens.

I’m told that those of us who aren’t white—a growing share of Americans—can take heart in knowing that our maltreatment is being discussed at all. This is akin to a cruel warden demanding extra pay for services rendered. Those who live with the myriad consequences of inequality are, at this point, unlikely to be impressed by mildly uncomfortable chatter about race in America.

Many are, quite frankly, already busy finding meaning in the American creed, creating new possibilities and erecting work-arounds with the ingenuity and grit that have sustained them thus far. And as was evident in last summer’s protests and the fall’s election returns, Americans, but particularly Black Americans, have and will put in work to make a democracy of equals real.

The situation reminds me of the first time I was called the *N* word to my face—far from the worst moment that being Black in America has brought me, but an instructive one.

A few months before I began kindergarten, my parents emerged triumphant from their battle with banks, real estate agents and the opportunities available to Black people in the U.S. labor market. They bought their first home in a North Texas suburb so new that a wrong turn meant driving on a dirt road.

My parents grew up in the Jim Crow South. They knew how scary so-called economic anxiety can get when one group’s stranglehold on privilege ends. So they didn’t expect things to be easy in the new neighborhood. What



mattered to me at the time: my sister and I quickly found friends. There were three white girls next door and a Black and white biracial brother and sister opposite us in the cul-de-sac.

When a new boy showed up—Chad, towheaded and in tube socks—we were glad to include him. He was one more person to make the day’s checkers tournament interesting and one more contender in our bike races to the end of the street and back. But when Chad lost, Chad got mad. Standing near the curb outside our house, he leaped off his bike after a race and said it: He was sick of playing with “stupid niggers.”

It was bad and everyone knew. When Chad hadn’t returned for his bike a half hour later, the Ross girls gathered a toolbox from our garage. With the help of our friends, we broke Chad’s bike down to its parts. Handlebars, pedals, tires, main body, screws and washers, all left in a pile. Chad—who presumed himself smarter and better; who said he wanted to play with us but didn’t like it when we won fair and square; who even as a child turned so automatically to that slur as soon as he saw that we, that day, beat him—would have to figure out how to get it all home. Later, Chad’s father, his son cowering behind him, rang our doorbell to demand that we apologize.

The experiences that accompany life in the body of a person of color are well documented. But even as the notion of white America’s inherent superiority is verbally rejected, very few are willing to use what power they have to shift the systems that have served them well. Some people who are used to winning are having trouble playing fair. But America should not expect people of color to apologize for disassembling the vehicles that support racial inequality.

The people out there with the screwdrivers and wrenches, trying to make the country into what it promised to be, are disproportionately people of color, particularly Black Americans. But if the suffering and loss of the past year is to have meaning, the work of private citizens cannot be enough. We must begin by holding to account those in power—especially the man in the White House.

The phrase *Talk is cheap* is a truism for a reason. We have heard enough. Now let’s watch for what is done. □

## Why hasn’t the police killing rate decreased?

**In the weeks after George Floyd was murdered by a Minneapolis police officer last May**, the insistence that his death would be—*must* be—the last such killing at the hands of law enforcement became a popular refrain. “I think what’s happened here is one of those great inflection points in American history, for real, in terms of civil liberties, civil rights and just treating people with dignity,” Joe Biden, then a candidate for the presidency, told CBS News. Republican pollster Frank Luntz declared, “We are a different country today than just 30 days ago.”

The numbers paint a far different story. Since June 2020, police in the U.S. have killed people across different backgrounds at virtually the same rate that they have for the past five years, according to several surveys, despite a pandemic that kept many people at home. As of April 30, there had only been six days this year on which police did not kill a civilian while on duty, according to Mapping Police Violence (MPV). Many promised reforms have stalled at the state level—including in the Minnesota legislature—as well as in Washington, with the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020 dying in the Senate. (An

updated version passed the House in March but faces a similar uphill Senate battle.)

“Simply put, you’re not seeing a reduction when you look at the data on killings by police,” says Samuel Sinyangwe, a co-founder of MPV.

The brunt of this violence is still directed disproportionately at Black people. According to MPV, Black people, who are 13% of the population, were 28% of those killed by police in 2020. They were more likely than white people to be unarmed and less likely to be threatening someone when killed. “When you look at the numbers, the disparities are mind-boggling,” Sinyangwe says.

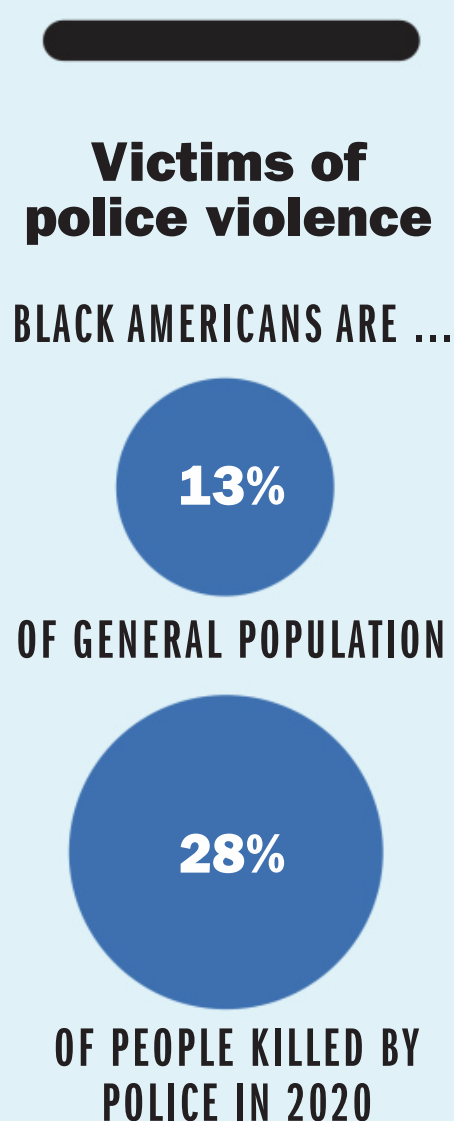
In some places, it’s police who are getting more protection. Florida Governor

Ron DeSantis signed a bill in April that he described as “the strongest anti-rioting, pro-law-enforcement piece of legislation in the country.” (Florida police have killed 21 people, at least seven of them Black, in 2021, according to MPV.)

Elsewhere, activists are building on decades of work to pass significant local reform. In Denver, a program that allows 911 operators to dispatch mental-health clinicians and paramedics to nonviolent incidents instead of police will expand throughout the city; the police chief called it a success and said it freed cops to fight crime. Maryland became the first state to repeal its police bill of rights, which shielded officers from investigation or discipline.

Tracie Keese, a leader at the Center for Policing Equity, sees small signs of progress, including the banning of choke holds by many large police departments and bodycam footage generally being released faster than in years past. “We didn’t get here in a year, and it’s not going to be finished in a year,” she says. “It all highlights how complex this is and how much work still needs to be done.”

—ANDREW R. CHOW,  
with reporting by  
SIMMONE SHAH/  
NEW YORK





# Global movements for justice

The video of Derek Chauvin kneeling on George Floyd's neck traveled from a Minneapolis street to every corner of the world. Black activists in the U.K. spoke of their visceral reactions to the footage, while Floyd's dying words, "I can't breathe," brought back painful memories in France and Australia of Black and Aboriginal people killed while in police custody. The video transcended borders on social media too, sparking solidarity protests in more than 50 nations, from Germany to Thailand, Argentina to Turkey.

Despite COVID-19 restrictions in many countries, hundreds of thousands of protesters turned out in solidarity and to show that racial injustice was not just an American problem. Many voiced frustrations at specific racist and colonial legacies. Statues of slave traders and imperialists became flash points across Europe, while #PapuanLivesMatter trended, highlighting discrimination against natives of West Papua and stirring calls for independence from Indonesia.

But as suddenly as it came, the global summer of Black Lives Matter (BLM) had been building over time. Grassroots activists had pushed for change for years, building movements for racial justice that inspired not only social awakenings but also concrete legislative change, corporate involvement and, inevitably, reactionary backlash. Here, how eight movements for equity took shape over the past year and where they aim to go next. —*Suyin Haynes*



## INDIA

**The Black Lives Matter movement prompted a reckoning in India** over colorism, discrimination against those with darker skin tones, which has deep roots in India's caste system and colonial history. Last summer, after Priyanka Chopra joined Indian stars in voicing support for BLM, social media users pointed out she and many others had promoted whitening cosmetics.

For years, activists had been speaking up about colorism in Indian culture—from Bollywood's promotion of light-skinned actors to the

global multibillion-dollar skin-whitening industry. In 2009, an Indian nonprofit started the Dark Is Beautiful campaign, endorsed by Bollywood actor Nandita Das, to raise awareness about color bias in schools and in the media.

The outcry of 2020 prompted some changes. The matchmaking service Shaadi.com stopped letting users sort by skin tone. But the road is long. While popular skin-lightening product Fair & Lovely changed its name to Glow & Lovely, the product's formula remained the same. —*Simmone Shah*





## JAPAN

**Black Lives Matter marches held across Japan in June 2020** were both a gesture of solidarity with protesters in the U.S. and a call to confront racism at home. Much of the discussion in Japan has centered on discrimination toward biracial individuals, following multiple high-profile incidents of prejudice. In 2019, a Japanese comedy duo said tennis icon Naomi Osaka—who was born to a Haitian father and a Japanese mother—“needed some bleach.” And that wasn’t the first such incident: Ariana Miyamoto, whose father is African American and mother is Japanese, faced criticism after being crowned Miss Universe Japan in 2015. In a country that is largely ethnically homogenous, these incidents have prompted calls for recognizing the Japaneseness of biracial people. —Kat Moon

Left: A march against racism in Tokyo on June 14; below: A woman at a protest against police brutality in Lagos, Nigeria, on Oct. 12

## NIGERIA

**After a video emerged in October that appeared to show officers** from Nigeria’s Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) killing a young man, protests erupted, led by young Nigerians who were angry with their government for ignoring corruption and extrajudicial killings. (Police initially denied responsibility.) The outcry went global when the military shot peaceful #endSARS demonstrators on Oct. 20, sending shock waves through the Nigerian diaspora. BLM co-founder Opal Tometi organized an open letter demanding justice for protesters who had reminded the world that Black Lives Matter, everywhere. —S.H.





## BRAZIL

**News of George Floyd's murder reached a Brazil already deep in crisis** over racial justice following the 2018 election of President Jair Bolsonaro. The far-right leader has compared Black people—who make up 56% of the country's population—to cattle, celebrated police brutality in mostly Black favelas and tried to strip Indigenous communities of protections. Meanwhile COVID-19's onslaught in Brazil, one of the worst-hit countries in the world, has killed Black people and wiped out their jobs at higher rates than it has white people.

Black Brazilians' protests brought unprecedented attention from the mostly white media to systemic racism in Brazil. In late 2020, several major companies introduced Black-only hiring programs. In November's local elections, Black candidates outnumbered white ones for the first time.

Still, despite those changes, the path forward for antiracism advocates is rocky. In April 2020, local media unearthed a video lesson published by Rio de Janeiro's state education body that claimed it was "unacceptable" to discuss racism in Brazil, arguing that high rates of interracial relationships made the term irrelevant. The President voiced the same sentiment in November, when protests broke out over the fatal beating of João Alberto Silveira Freitas, a Black father of four, by grocery-store security guards in the city of Porto Alegre.

In the face of public denial, Black activist networks have become more active than ever, organizing to feed families struggling during the pandemic, overhaul the education system and protect neighborhoods from police violence.  
—Ciara Nugent

## AUSTRALIA

**Australia had some of the largest protests outside the U.S. after George Floyd's murder.** Tens of thousands of people took to the streets in cities across the country during June. Alongside BLACK LIVES MATTER signs, protesters carried placards with the names of some of the 476 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who, according to the *Guardian*, have died in police custody since 1991. A disproportionate number of the continent's Indigenous people reside in its prisons: they accounted for 29% of Australia's inmates in June 2020, despite being only 3% of the population.

The wave of demonstrations had some impact. New South Wales, the Australian state that's home to Sydney, launched a parliamentary inquiry into how deaths in custody are investigated, and the state of South Australia made it mandatory for police to notify the state's Aboriginal Legal Service whenever an Aboriginal person is taken into custody. In late July, the federal government also announced a target of moving 15% of Indigenous adults out of prison by 2031.

But the problem persists. At least seven Aboriginal people have died in custody since the beginning of March, prompting one Australian senator to call the situation a "national crisis." —Amy Gunia



## NEW ZEALAND

**Elections in New Zealand** in October 2020 brought to power one of the world's most diverse governments. The first parliamentarians of African, Latin American and Sri Lankan heritage were voted in; almost half of the seats went to women; more than 10% of lawmakers identify as LGBTQ. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's Cabinet picks were no less

diverse, including the country's first Indigenous female Foreign Minister and first openly gay Deputy Prime Minister.

Representation for Maori people is also high. New Zealand's original inhabitants, who make up some 17% of the population, now hold around 20% of parliament's 120 seats and 25% of Cabinet positions. Among the new parliamentarians are two





members of the Maori Party, which made a comeback after being ousted in 2017.

But despite representation at the highest levels of government, Maori people face worse outcomes than non-Maori people in many areas. The Maori unemployment rate is more than double the national rate, and they are more likely to be homeless. Their life expectancy is about seven years

shorter, and they are more than twice as likely to die from assault and homicide.

Now, the Maori Party has promised to be an unapologetic voice for Indigenous New Zealanders. “You know what it feels like to have a pebble in your shoe?” the party’s co-leader Rawiri Waititi said in December, in his first speech in parliament. “That will be my job here.” —A.G.

The New Zealand Labour Party’s female MPs on the steps of parliament on Nov. 24, 2020, in Wellington

## FRANCE

**In July 2016, 24-year-old Adama Traoré was out walking, looking forward to celebrating his birthday later in the evening, when police apprehended him.**

Traoré, who was Malian-French, later died in police custody; his last words were reportedly “I can’t breathe,” the same as George Floyd’s final words. Protests erupted in Paris after Traoré’s death—and resurged last year when Floyd’s murder drew renewed attention to police violence around the same time that an independent autopsy commissioned by Traoré’s family ruled that Adama died of asphyxiation after being restrained.

Activists say Adama’s case is part of a long history of police brutality in France, where young Arab and Black men are 20 times as likely as white men to be stopped by law enforcement. In early June, tens of thousands of people defied coronavirus restrictions to protest in cities across France—with Adama’s sister, Assa, at the forefront of marches in Paris. As public outcry grew, France announced a ban on choke-hold arrest tactics on June 8.

Even after the protests, similar police behavior has continued; in November, a video emerged of three white police officers beating Black music producer Michel Zecler at his Paris studio. Mass protests and outrage ensued, particularly in response to proposed legislation that sought to criminalize those who distribute imagery of police officers in action. “The Adama generation is on the street to speak out against police brutality, racial discrimination,” Assa Traoré told *TIME* late last year. Parliament approved an adapted version of that security bill, which extends police powers, in April, despite the outcry. —Suyin Haynes





An Edward Colston statue is torn down on June 7

## UNITED KINGDOM

**In June, Black Lives Matter protesters in the U.K. drew worldwide attention** when they tore down a statue of 17th century slave trader Edward Colston and threw it into the harbor of Bristol in southwest England. But long before June, campaigners, activists and historians were interrogating the U.K.'s imperial past, and its deep implications for the present.

A widely condemned government-commissioned report in March claimed that U.K. society was “no longer” rigged against people from ethnic minorities and “should be regarded as a model for other white-majority countries.” (U.N. experts called the report an “attempt to normalize white supremacy.”) Official studies show racial disparities across the board. Police data suggest that Black people are nine times as likely as white people to be stopped and searched by police in England and Wales, and according to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, unemployment rates are significantly higher among

ethnic minorities than white people. Campaigners have also called for an independent public inquiry into the handling of the pandemic and its disproportionate impact on Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, who faced up to 50% higher risk of death from COVID-19 when compared with white Brits. Anti-Asian hate and discrimination has also soared during the pandemic, with U.K. police data suggesting a threefold increase in hate crimes toward East and Southeast Asians in the first quarter of 2020 compared with the same period in 2018 and 2019.

Activists are pushing for changes including shifting school curriculums to include the history of the British Empire, returning museum objects looted from former colonies and exploring the links between British stately homes and slavery. Despite backlash from conservative politicians and right-wing media, a re-examination of Britain's racist past and present is finally getting under way.  
—*Suyin Haynes*

U.K.: BEN BIRCHALL—PA WIRE/AP; SAINT JOHN: AMY SUSSMAN—FILMMAGIC/GETTY IMAGES; WRIGHT: TONI L. SANDYS—THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES

## The business of change

### MANAGING PEOPLE AND PROJECTS WHILE PROMOTING RACIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION

BY JOHN SIMONS

AS PROTESTERS TOOK TO THE STREETS IN THE aftermath of George Floyd's murder, cries of solidarity rang out from the unlikelyst of places: the boardrooms and C-suites of the world's most prominent companies. Protesters channeled their anger into demands of accountability from institutions they believed had long been complicit in promoting—and perhaps even profiting from—racism. A handful of companies looked inward for ways to further diversity, equity and inclusion. They began hiring, promoting and creating new positions for people of color.

TIME spoke with two of those newly appointed leaders: Bozoma Saint John, chief marketing officer at Netflix (and the first Black C-level executive at the company), and Jason Wright, president of the Washington Football Team (the NFL's first Black team president), about the future of America's racial reckoning and the dual burdens of performing high-profile corporate roles while also promoting change.

**TIME: What excites you both about your new positions? And what are the main things you're working on right now?**

**Bozoma Saint John:** This has been quite a complicated year. Lots of personal introspection. For me, there has been a lot that has gone behind my decision to go to Netflix. I find it to be a really important moment, not just for Netflix, but for all of us as consumers who are watching what is happening around the world, trying to understand each other's perspectives, trying to understand each other's stories and struggles—and be inspired.



**Jason Wright:** On both sides of my family, I come from a lineage of civil rights activists, and the values that they brought were of social elevation over time, one generation's ceiling being the next generation's floor. For me, the underpinning of inequity



and racial injustice is the lack of equitable distribution of capital. The Washington Football Team is a franchise that is in its own reckoning, that needed to shift from something that was not universally inclusive to something that is healthy, inclusive, dynamic and innovative. We're getting ready to invest several billion dollars of capital to build a new venue and entertainment complex and to be an economic development engine for the D.C.-Maryland-Virginia area. For a 38-year-old brother from L.A., to be able to oversee the distribution of that sort of generationally shifting capital, it was a no-brainer for me to jump into a role like this.

**What do you both think about the role that companies should play in creating and pushing for societal change?**

**Wright:** The NFL sits at a true cross section of America. That's why so many of the challenging conversations around racial equity and other topics have found themselves a home in and around the NFL. That is both an opportunity and a challenge. As a former NFL player myself, I think the players have learned the power of their voices. They've become incredibly sophisticated and educated on topics they care about.

So coming out of the summertime narrative around Wisconsin, and the murder of George Floyd in Minnesota, our players—along with many other athletes around the globe—decided to take a pause and say, “We’re not playing right now”; “We need to have a robust discussion on this.” They said, “Look, No. 1, we want to effect policy change.” Across Virginia and Maryland, our guys were able to participate alongside law-enforcement leaders and state legislators to get police-reform legislation through those states. One of our stars—Chase Young—was testifying in the Maryland legislature as this bill was passed. I see it as my job as a business leader to hear what they want to do, put the infrastructure and resources around them, and then promote the crap out of it with our brand, and tie it to the values that are universal.

We also did a big voting campaign; we led the way here in the area to put our stadium and our infrastructure to be a registration and polling site. We had to really effect change in a nonpartisan, unambiguously good way.

**Saint John:** We forget that businesses are made of people. It's really important for all of us who are leaders in these businesses to show up with our concerns on our sleeves, in our hearts. I take it as a personal responsibility to make sure that my own beliefs are also coming through the work that I do. As business leaders, that is actually our responsibility too, and we can't shy away from it. We can't hide behind logos. We have to have a

**‘WE CAN’T HIDE  
BEHIND LOGOS.  
WE HAVE TO  
HAVE A VOICE.’**

**BOZOMA SAINT JOHN**

voice. For us, we find that there are ways to do that in the storytelling, providing different types of views into a diverse body of people. When we talk about Blackness, for instance, it's not just about the American Black experience, but you have *Lupin*, about a French Black man, and *Zero*, which is about the Black Italian experience. I think those are examples and how we want to make sure that when we think about diversity and inclusion or societal change, there are many ways in which we can do that. It's not just through policy; it's also through culture. You don't mind having people's opinions shift and change because they see somebody has experience in storytelling and entertainment.

**A lot of Black executives in positions like yours feel like they have two jobs—the one on their business card, and a completely separate role helping bring about a more inclusive culture in their organizations. Do you feel that in your current roles? And if so, how do you juggle those demands?**

**Wright:** The first and best thing I can do is do my job well. And if I'm successful in this role, there's a little bit of a copycat syndrome across industries, where a brother who looked like this did well in this role, maybe we can hire another one [who] looks like that. And that's the most superficial, cynical way of looking at it, but it's real; it's how the human brain works. And so first and foremost, how do I get us to becoming a top five performing financial franchise in the NFL? How do I steward a transition from a football franchise into a media and entertainment company? How do I successfully launch a new brand, and identity?

**Saint John:** Oh, yes, yes, yes. I do feel it as a duality. Being a Black woman just adds to it. I used to think it was a real burden. Early in my career, I'd fight against it. It's like Jason was saying, you just want to do the good work. I just wanted to do my job, and wanted to be recognized for my work. Often, I found that I very much had to represent so much more than just myself.

And on top of that, a failure meant it wasn't just me failing. It meant every Black woman could fail in that job, which then added the pressure and the burden of having to succeed. Now I see it as a real opportunity. I'm like, “Yes, I'm going to show out, actually. I will do it better than everyone.” Therefore, you won't even question whether a Black woman can have a C-suite job in one of the biggest companies in the world, because I can do it—and I do it better than everybody. I see it as a real badge of honor, to represent. But I certainly don't want to be the only representative forever. I would like there to be more of us, for sure. □



# Strength in community

THE SUPREME THRILL OF SHARING SPACE WITH others has never been so keenly felt—or missed—as in the past year. In a time marked by immeasurable loss, fear and upheaval, *pods* and *social distancing* entered the common lexicon, their frequent use serving as constant reminders of both our hunger for connection and its current limitations. So too did *BIPOC*, the acronym for Black, Indigenous and people of color—and it was these communities who not only highlighted the inequities of a system that wasn't built for them but also created spaces that helped provide joy, comfort and sustenance during a year unlike any other.

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that the shared values of care and compassion have largely defined the fellowship of marginalized communities during this time, given the long history of stepping up for one another when society has failed to do so. If mutual aid and community fridges were embraced by the mainstream last summer, BIPOC-led organizations throughout history—like the Black Panther Party with its free-breakfast program and health clinics—have always served as vital support systems.

Here, we highlight five of these community pods that follow in this legacy of care. While many were formed or solidified in the wake of converging cultural shifts from the pandemic and a national reckoning over race, they are also defined by shared







## SEATTLE

**NorthStar Cycling Club takes its name not just from the sky,** but also from history—the star Harriet Tubman used as a guide to free enslaved Americans. “When we get on our bikes, it is an element of freedom,” says founding member Edwin Lindo, who launched the cycling club based in Seattle in February 2020, just before the pandemic started. He and co-founder Aaron Bossett wanted to encourage more BIPOC individuals to take up cycling. Lindo, who identifies as Central American, attributes the lack of diversity in cycling to attitudes that often focus on questions like “Do you have the nicest bike?” or “Do you have the fastest bike?” This culture, he says, is not welcoming to individuals who might not have the means to take up the sport. “There’s an archetype of cycling—we’re not it.”

The community has grown to more than 140 members who connect virtually on Slack, with anywhere from 25 to 85 participating in Sunday rides for people of all levels and ages. The group is about blending political issues like police brutality and racialized health inequities with riding, in a spirit of inclusivity that extends to the cycling novice: in early May, one participant learned how to brake on a bike, and then rode 18 miles with the group. “It has been a point of grace and inspiration and absolute joy and freedom,” Lindo says. “I don’t know what I would do without it.” —Kat Moon





interests and purposes. From NorthStar, a Seattle cycling group that has grown by nearly 97% since it began last year, to a Buffalo, N.Y., photography studio pod that offers support to its members, these spaces have provided much-needed respite and solidarity.

Their members have long been disproportionately affected by health-related, economic and racial inequalities, which have only been exacerbated this past year. In some cases, experience with such hardships made them better equipped to face them. House of Grace, a support network for queer and trans folks in Puerto Rico, began work in this space before the pan-

demic, and reaffirmed its mission in the face of a new crisis.

The pandemic has also redefined how we come together; meeting doesn't have to take up physical space, but it can still be emotional, spiritual and fulfilling. When Ramadan began soon after the pandemic took hold in the U.S. last spring, Imran and Atifa Malik's family missed the celebrations that once defined the holiday. That inspired them to bring together members of the Muslim community in Ohio virtually—which eventually became an in-person space for connection across families and generations.

Meanwhile an online course about

identity and history sparked a connection among a group of Asian-American women across the country. It soon led to a group chat and monthly Zoom hangs. "I feel so bonded to them, even though their experiences might not be exactly the same as mine," Amy Ding says of her new virtual cohort. "As Asian women, there was deep healing and a deep yearning for more of this type of community." At a time in which staying 6 ft. apart has often hampered intimacy, communities of color have provided a different path forward and created connections that promise to outlast a period marked by uncertainty. —Cady Lang





## PUERTO RICO

**In 2018, trans activist and poet María José** started House of Grace to create a community where trans and nonbinary people of color in Puerto Rico could safely explore their identities. The need for spaces like these has only become more urgent: the Human Rights Campaign reports that at least 12 LGBTQ people have been killed in Puerto Rico since the start of 2019,

and the island's governor declared a state of emergency over gender violence on Jan. 24. "This is such a cruel world to us," says Coqueta, a 25-year-old trans dancer, one of 12 House of Grace members who meet and live in locations across Puerto Rico, including Guaynabo, Río Piedras and Toa Baja. Coqueta says they all have "chosen this as their family because they know

they don't have the same support elsewhere."

Beibijavi, 23, had left their biological family's house—"It wasn't a safe space for me"—and lived intermittently with different House of Grace members during the pandemic. Among the collective, self-care, collaboration and mutual support are key. "We got each other," Coqueta says. —K.M., with reporting by Alejandra Rosa





## BUFFALO, N.Y.

**The photographers came together** after the pandemic had largely shut down film and TV production, magazine shoots and other industries that generated assignments for them. Based in Buffalo, N.Y., Derrick Carr, Adrian

Javon, Malik Rainey and Brandon Watson—four Black men in their 20s, whose specialties range from advertising to photojournalism—formed a studio pod to support one another. “We were all we had,” says Rainey, 21. They strive to

elevate Black talent and other talent of color in their work, and regularly share opportunities whenever one hears of something that might be a fit for another. “In our group, what we believe is uplifting each other,” Rainey says. In what he describes as a “very

whitewashed profession,” they are eager to show it’s possible to be a successful Black photographer. And their relationships extend beyond photography: “At the end of the day,” Rainey says, “we’re human beings first; we’re artists second.” —K.M.





## VIRTUAL

**The women first met last fall, in a six-week-long** online course hosted by AARISE (Asian American Racialized Identity and Social Empowerment) about history, identity, emotional processing and healing. Amy Ding, 24, wanted to learn more about her identity to become a better ally to other communities of color after George Floyd's murder. Ding and six other Asian-American women—ranging in age from mid-20s to late 30s

and scattered across the U.S. from New York, where Ding lives, to Missouri to Texas—continued to connect after the course ended. “When I think of how I’ve been supported by this group, a lot of it is feeling reaffirmed that there are other people who know what I’m talking about,” Ding says. They chat on WhatsApp and meet monthly on Zoom, discussing books and podcasts that celebrate Asian-American voices; personal relationships;

and their experiences with microaggressions and racism. “There’s definitely been a lot of experiences of being gaslit,” Ding says. After a white male shooter killed six Asian women in Atlanta in March, she turned to this group for support. Although they lack physical proximity, they share a tangible bond. “It’s feeling really seen and heard by these women,” she says, “which is funny, because I haven’t met any of them in person.” —K.M.











## DUBLIN, OHIO

### **For Imran and Atifa Malik's family, Ramadan wasn't the same in 2020.**

The Muslim holy month, usually defined by community, had become painfully isolating. "It's the time to get together and celebrate and share in blessings and do community work," says Atifa, 44. "With the pandemic, we didn't have that." Her family, along with many others in and around their Columbus suburb, could not go to mosques or drop off food in each other's homes as is customary. Instead, Atifa and some friends arranged for their kids to recite the Quran together online.

Her family and several others who were close before the pandemic formed a multi-generational group to connect virtually on a regular basis. This Ramadan, following the vaccinations of most members of the group, some gatherings are shifting from virtual to in person. The Maliks were joined by four other families on the evening of May 5 to break their fast together with iftar, the evening meal eaten after sunset. "We're trying to get some normalcy in our lives," says Afsheen Rizvi, 45, who attended with her husband and two sons. "Living in this country, being a minority, we depend on each other, our community and especially the religious aspects." Before the in-person events resumed, Atifa says, the group's online gatherings provided emotional support in some of her toughest moments. "It was a huge blessing." —K.M.



# 40 ways forward

## ACTIONABLE STEPS FOR A MORE EQUITABLE AMERICA

THE EVENTS OF THE PAST YEAR—A global health crisis, mass protests against police brutality, a surge in hate crimes—laid bare the vast inequities that have persisted in the U.S. for centuries. Drawing on the expertise of leaders across the country, TIME set out to compile a list of actionable steps that the U.S. could take to usher in an era of true social, political and economic equity.

The root causes of inequities are complex and intertwined; identifying and addressing them involves the near impossible task of chipping away at the sedimentary layers of history and

systemic injustice. One certainty: dismantling them will require work on the part of everyone, from political representatives with the power to change policy to business leaders whose decisions inform capitalist society, to citizens, because our behavior shapes our communities. For recommendations, we consulted with 59 scholars, activists and innovators across a range of fields, seeking out the strongest and most creative actions to align reality in the United States with its founding principles at last. Some of the ideas existed as demands for decades. Some challenge

accepted thinking. Activist Ady Barkan and U.S. Assistant Secretary for Health Rachel Levine argue for expanding health care protections to the vulnerable. Leadership expert Vivian Hunt and author Minda Harts call on businesses to diversify their ranks and create workplaces that are supportive for all. Me Too founder Tarana Burke and researcher Brené Brown underscore the importance of instilling empathy in the next generation. The goal is an America that is stronger and safer. Here are 40 ways to begin the work.

—Mahita Gajanan

### VOTE

Voting in federal elections is important. Voting in local elections is arguably more important, particularly when it comes to creating equity. “You can’t have equity if you don’t have large participation in the voting process,” says Cliff Albright, co-founder of Black Voters Matter.

Voting at the local level can quickly deliver visible changes to communities, and in most states the party that controls the legislature draws Congressional maps, carving out districts that make it easier for their own party to win the U.S. House. Yet turnout is higher in national elections than in the local ones that shape them.

Americans have a “responsibility” to vote, says Albright, but laws that limit access mean willingness isn’t the only factor when it comes to casting a vote and having it counted. “When you have policies that open up access and send a message that you want people to vote, a funny thing happens,” he says. “More people vote.” —Sanya Mansoor





## END FAMILY DETENTION

**The U.S. has three detention centers specifically for immigrant families,** where children are held as they wait for courts to decide whether they and their parents will be allowed to stay in the U.S.

The American Academy of Pediatrics says children should never be placed in detention because of the physical and psychological toll it takes, even for a short time. And yet the last several Administrations

have detained immigrant parents and their children for months at a time.

As long as the U.S. detains families, it can never live up to its ideal of being a land of opportunity, says Bridget Cambria, executive director of Aldea—the People’s Justice Center, which represents detained families. Family detention is “a travesty of human rights,” Cambria says. “The government doesn’t have to detain anyone. It’s a choice.”

—*Jasmine Aguilera*

## ENACT UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE

**The U.S. is the richest country** in history—yet tens of millions of people are without the health care they need. Medicare for All would give everyone health care for free at the point of service—including for reproductive care. President Biden has proposed an enormous investment in care for elders and people with disabilities, while Democratic leaders in Congress are pushing to lower drug prices, and to strengthen and expand Medicare. If they can pass these laws, they will move us meaningfully closer to achieving health care justice in America.

—*Ady Barkan, activist*

## REFORM THE THRIFTY FOOD PLAN

Adequate access to food is economic justice. Too many people are forced to stretch their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits because they don’t cover the full cost of food. The program is determined by the federal government’s Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), a 46-year-old plan, last updated in 2006, that doesn’t reflect the current economy. All these factors disproportionately impact people of color. It’s time to re-evaluate the TFP to increase SNAP benefits as a critical step forward toward equity. —*Parker L. Gilkesson, policy analyst*

## INTEGRATE SCHOOLS

**The violence caused by racism can work fast, like a bullet, or its work can be of the slow-murdering kind.** Over the past year, both the American Medical Association and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have proclaimed structural racism a public-health crisis—one that impacts many children in the very institutions where they spend much of their time: schools.

Segregated, unequal and underfunded schools, and the education received in them, constitute an under-acknowledged form of structural or institutional racism that, over time, harms as surely as physical violence. The impacts are educational, but also psychological, emotional, spiritual and physical. We see it in the mental turmoil, self-doubt and insecurity caused by unequal educational systems showing children in our society that they are simply less important than others.

In the preamble to its constitution, the World Health Organization says that health is a state of “complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” This is not the state of health for students who attend segregated schools. Simply put: racial segregation is unhealthy. We can do better.

—*Noliwe Rooks, scholar of race and gender at Cornell University*





## PAY WORKERS FAIR WAGES

Home health aides, cleaning staff and service workers faced some of the highest health risks during the crisis, but you wouldn't know it by their paychecks. The federal minimum wage has remained at \$7.25 an hour for more than a decade. Cripplingly low wages disproportionately affect women and people of color: more than half of Black workers and nearly 60% of Latinx workers earn less than \$15 per hour, according to the National Employment Law Project. With a few powerful industry groups opposed, advocates say the onus is on Congress to raise a salary floor that, had it tracked with inflation and productivity growth since the '60s, would stand at more than \$20 per hour.

—Alejandro de la Garza



## INVEST IN ELIMINATING ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS AND PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE

Across the U.S., more than 1 million people lack access to piped water in their homes, while millions more live in homes contaminated with lead that can cause developmental defects in children. More than 1,300 Superfund sites—locations that have been polluted by industrial activity and pose a risk to environmental health—sit acknowledged but unaddressed, threatening local communities.

These are just a few of the myriad environmental hazards that disproportionately burden communities of color. “What outrages

me, frankly, is how comfortable this country has become with the fact that we have so many children drinking lead water, that we still have Superfund sites,” Senator Cory Booker, a New Jersey Democrat, told TIME last year. Rooting out the systemic forces that have led to this disparity will be complicated, but environmental-justice activists say there's a good place to start: the government should commit to spending the money to fix these problems.

The Biden Administration has committed to directing 40%

of the benefits of its infrastructure package to these underserved communities, pledging to eliminate lead pipes and to invest in cleaning up polluted areas. But the activists on the front line worry that won't be enough. “We have a lot to do to just get ourselves to the point where we are addressing past harm—and there's no way that just 40% is going to get us there,” says Miya Yoshitani, executive director of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network. “We have to be so much more ambitious.”

—Justin Worland

## EMPOWER HOMEGROWN PEACEMAKERS



To solve the gun-violence epidemic that impacts our communities of color, we need to identify, train and fund homegrown peacemakers to change things from within.

One example can be found in Los Angeles, where the Gang Reduction and Youth Development office was established in 2007 in response to the “A Call to Action” report by civil rights attorney Connie Rice. Part of the office's strategy was to identify community members in the most violent areas of the city who had the lived experience and could be trained and deployed as

community-violence-intervention workers.

The training program, conducted by the Urban Peace Institute, is known as the Los Angeles Violence Intervention Training Academy. It consists of 144 hours of training that includes courses on subjects such as conflict mediation, proactive peace building, violence interruption, crisis response, trauma-informed care and interpersonal violence. The strategy has led to record-low homicides in Los Angeles.

—Paul Carrillo, Community Violence Initiative director for Giffords Law Center



## KEEP POLICE FOCUSED ON CRIME

**Police mostly respond to noncriminal incidents,** and statistics show that the majority of officers spend little of their on-duty time handling violent crimes. But most police officers are not properly trained to deal with situations that don't call for some form of force, and this mismatch of skills and training has an outsize impact on low-income minority communities.

Advocates in favor of removing noncriminal responsibilities from police, a central call to action within the

“defund” movement, argue that it would limit encounters with armed officers and diminish hostile interactions. They recommend that mental-health and drug-use calls be handled by trained social workers and health care professionals.

While critics warn against removing police officers from situations that could turn violent, advocates counter that officers could be present on calls where there is a potential for violence, but they should not be the first responders.

—Josiah Bates

## IMPLEMENT UNIVERSAL HOUSING VOUCHERS

**Millions of American families faced a housing emergency even before the COVID-19 crisis,** with over 11 million households spending more than 50% of their income on rent, and nearly 8 million spending over 50% of their income on their mortgage, according to the Urban Institute. Those lower-income families have been hit hardest by the pandemic. Much of our social safety net to support families with stable housing at the federal level involves the Housing Choice Voucher Program, commonly called Section 8, in which families have part of their rent subsidized by a federal voucher paid directly to the landlord. Discrimination makes it harder for racial minorities, families with children, the LGBTQIA community and people with disabilities to find housing, with landlords either refusing to accept the vouchers or offering limited housing choices to families with vouchers. Millions of Americans who are eligible don't receive the benefit because its funding is far outpaced by need.

The answer is a universal housing voucher program, as proposed by President Joe Biden during the 2020 campaign, which would fully fund the program to meet the full eligible population. When low-income families receive housing vouchers, data shows that they are less likely to experience food insecurity, be separated from their children and experience domestic violence. These outcomes are too important for the benefit to remain limited to a narrow subset of the eligible population. A home is more than a building block for children and families to grow and advance their dreams. It's a basic human right.

—Wes Moore, CEO of Robin Hood

## ESTABLISH A PATHWAY TO CITIZENSHIP

**I've lived for two years without my family.** In 2019, I was featured in a documentary critical of the U.S. immigrant-detention system. After it came out, I was deported to Argentina after living in the U.S. for almost 20 years. A pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants would not only allow us to obtain better jobs so we aren't taken advantage of or abused—it would also allow us to be heard. The day undocumented people can express themselves without fear, the country will be a more equal place.

—Claudio Rojas, activist

## CEDE DECISION-MAKING POWER IN HOLLYWOOD

**We have either been stereotyped or missing from the narrative throughout Hollywood's history.** If someone who has never interacted with a person like me doesn't see humanized representations of us on TV, then of course we're going to end up in cages. Hollywood measures diversity in front of the camera. But when you look at the people making decisions, it gets more white, cis and male. Hiring BIPOC executives is just the first step. Those with power must cede it. We need a breakage of bones to reset. —Tanya Saracho, TV creator

## ENHANCE REPRESENTATION IN C-SUITES AND BOARDROOMS

**Beyond the moral imperative for corporations to become more equitable,** diversity among companies' highest ranks can yield measurable rewards. Research shows that more diverse organizations perform better financially—and the single biggest variable inside a company is leadership appointments. Companies with diverse executive teams are more likely to be profitable; 25% more likely for gender diversity and 36% more likely for ethnic diversity. Diverse executive teams are particularly important, as they are the primary drivers of company strategy and organizational transformation. They can effect change by hiring a critical mass of underrepresented people throughout all levels of companies and committing to inclusive operating practices. Business leaders should not be discouraged or afraid to take on these complex issues and should be candid about their experiences pushing for change, because that shows humanity, realism and pragmatism. No company has made this journey without making some mistakes. Despite corporate statements about inclusion, many companies have still not made material progress. Corporate leaders must sharply interrogate hiring practices and company policies for equity, diversity and inclusion. They must be bold.

—Dame Vivian Hunt, senior partner, McKinsey & Co.



## PROVIDE APPROPRIATE MENTAL-HEALTH CARE

Black Americans cannot be given appropriate mental-health care until the field of psychiatry reckons with its long history of racism. From Benjamin Rush, the “father” of psychiatry, who coined the term *negritude* (as in, the “disorder” of being Black), to the 1970s marketing of the antipsychotic drug Haldol as a treatment for so-called protest psychosis (a diagnosis created to describe Black men fighting for basic human rights), mental-health care in the U.S. has long dehumanized Black patients.

Today, Black and white children evincing the same symptoms are likely to be diagnosed with disruptive disorders and ADHD, respectively, and Black patients of all ages are more likely to be seen as psychotic than depressed. To provide adequate care to Black patients, and to all patients of color, providers must learn about the mental-health effects of racism and do the work to counteract their own racism. —*Dr. Amanda Calhoun, psychiatric resident at Yale University*



## INVEST IN LOW-COST SPORTS PROGRAMS AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

**For kids, the benefits of physical activity are clear: playing sports can lead to better educational, social and health outcomes.** But for too many families, the price of swinging a bat, or shooting a ball, is far too steep. Youth sports in America has evolved into a professionalized, pay-to-play \$19 billion industry, reliant on travel competitions for 7-year-olds that can stretch the wallet. According to 2020 data compiled for the Aspen Institute, before the pandemic, the average family spent \$927 annually on youth sports;

parents have reported expenses up to \$23,000 per year on soccer and \$20,000 on basketball. Kids from low-income households are more likely to skip expensive sports and suffer from inactivity. COVID-19, which has disproportionately hurt poor families, will likely leave these children further behind as the youth sports economy restarts.

“We’re seeing an even greater polarization of the haves and the have-nots,” says Travis Dorsch, director of the Families in Sport Lab at Utah State University. Investing





in low-cost, community-based opportunities for young Americans can help reduce inequality and cut long-term health care costs.

Policymakers can innovate: New York State, for example, will set aside \$5 million in annual revenue from mobile sports gambling activities to fund youth sports in underserved areas. And business stakeholders, like professional leagues and sporting-goods manufacturers, have incentive to increase youth sports access: today's kids are tomorrow's fans and customers. —Sean Gregory

## PRESERVE AND EXPAND EARLY VOTING

**Trying to vote on one Tuesday in November clearly doesn't work for everyone.**

To get more people to the polls, we need to create more opportunities for early voting and voting by mail. Americans voted in record numbers in the 2020 elections, and nearly 70% cast their votes by mail or before Election Day. Voting-rights experts credit the unprecedented turnout to states' expansion of early voting. But, they say, Congress ultimately has the responsibility to set minimum standards to preserve and expand the right to vote.

—Sanya Mansoor

## MAKE COLLEGE DEBT-FREE

**Colleges are engines of upward mobility,** but the path to a degree is blocked for too many. Black, Latino and Native American adults are less likely to hold a college degree today than white adults were in 1990. Low-income students are less likely to finish college. Among the biggest hurdles? Colleges' rising costs and the student debt crisis. One solution: double the Pell Grant for low-income students and create a new partnership between states and the federal government to pay for higher education. It's time to make college debt-free. —Wil Del Pilar, vice president for the Education Trust

## REFORM TAXATION TO NARROW THE WEALTH GAP

**In 1916, only 1% of Americans filed a tax return.** Among those one-percenters was Frederick Brewster, a wealthy financier who inherited a considerable fortune that was for decades behind only John D. Rockefeller Sr.'s in size. That year, Brewster sold property at a gain and argued that since he was only an occasional seller, he shouldn't be forced to pay taxes on the gain. The Bureau of Internal Revenue (now the Internal Revenue Service) disagreed and said the gain should be taxed. Brewster used his considerable wealth to take his case all the way to the Supreme Court—and lost in 1921. But he and his fellow one-percenters—an elite group defined by wealth in a society with high income inequality—snatched a victory from the jaws of defeat when, in that very same year, Congress enacted a lower tax rate for property sales like his.

Those are the roots of the low preferential rate for capital gains, or income from capital assets like stocks. Income from stock is taxed today at a maximum rate of 20%, compared with income from wages, which may be taxed at up to 37%. In 2018, the top 1% of taxpayers by income received 75% of the tax benefits from stock ownership. The low tax rate applies when

stock is owned directly (as opposed to through a retirement account), and in 2019, only 15% of families owned stock that way.

What makes this worse is how stock ownership in America is racialized. Research shows white Americans are more likely to own stock than Black or Hispanic Americans, even after controlling for income. White middle-class families are more than twice as likely as Black middle-class families to own stock. Lower-income white families are more likely to own stock than higher-income Black Americans. One estimate places stock ownership as contributing 23% toward the racial wealth gap for Black and Hispanic households. Not even wealthy Black Americans can escape the disparity. Wealthy Black Americans are less likely to own stock than their white peers. For the top 5% of wealthy Black Americans, just under 30% owned stock directly, compared with 41% of their white peers.

The preferential treatment Frederick Brewster helped create in 1921 is long overdue for reform. Income from stock must be taxed the same way as income from wages. Surely rich white Americans who say Black lives matter would agree.

—Dorothy A. Brown, author of *The Whiteness of Wealth*



## OFFER PAID, EQUALLY SHARED FAMILY LEAVE

The Family and Medical Leave Act only offers unpaid family leave, which means the partner earning less is more likely to take it. Because of the persistent gender wage gap, that's usually a woman. Providing paid family leave is a step, but even in states that offer it, men are often reluctant to take time off because of gendered stereotypes around work and parenting. In order to encourage shared caregiving, some advanced democracies like Iceland and Sweden allocate paid family leave equally to both parents—and it can't be transferred. The policy is structured so that it's in the best interest of families for parents to participate in equal caregiving. —*Melissa Murray, NYU law professor*



## CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

**For decades, there has been a widening chasm between those with ready access to the Internet and computers and those without—a gap that was exacerbated when COVID-19 sent the world into lockdown.** Millions of Americans already struggling because they lack access to broadband services—including large swaths of the elderly, people living with disabilities, low-income families and those in rural areas—were marooned.

"It is imperative that we think about digital access as an insecurity like we look at food and housing," says Nicol Turner Lee, director of the Brookings Center for Technology Innovation.

To close the "digital divide," experts say

we need to address the accessibility, affordability, and adoption of information and communications technology. Despite our increasingly digital existence, dead zones remain across the country where no major Internet providers are available. If there is service, it is often unreliable or too expensive.

The pandemic, which abruptly thrust our lives online, prompted public and private sectors to address digital inequities. The FCC launched efforts to map gaps in coverage and created a program to subsidize the costs of Internet services and devices. Telecom giants offered lower-cost broadband options to consumers with an

economic need. And the Biden Administration proposed spending \$100 billion to invest in "future-proof" broadband networks, while Republicans pitched \$65 billion.

Turner Lee argues these should be permanent measures. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, about 16% of U.S. adults are not digitally literate because of lack of access and language barriers. To have a "fully connected society," Amina Fazlullah, director of equity policy at Common Sense Media, says policymakers and telecom providers must equip and empower communities to integrate the Internet into their routines.

—*Paulina Cachero*

## PROHIBIT EMPLOYERS FROM SILENCING ACCUSERS



**Four years after TIME dubbed the women who jump-started the #MeToo movement the Silence Breakers,** the favored legal tools used to keep victims quiet remain in place at many companies across the U.S. Companies wield mandatory arbitration clauses and nondisclosure agreements like a sword and shield to protect employees who engage in misconduct. Mandatory arbitration agreements push disputes between employees and employers out of open court, so legal matters are decided not by a judge but by an arbitrator, and studies

show workers win less often in arbitration than in court. Victims can't openly testify, and journalists can't as easily report the stories to the public.

Nondisclosure agreements threaten legal action against survivors who might speak up, allowing perpetrators of harm to cover up claims against them. Violations will remain in the shadows as long as companies, or government, allow them to. Exposing abuses of power helps end them.

—*Eliana Dockterman*



## DIVERSIFY THE WORKFORCE, AND SET UP ALL EMPLOYEES FOR SUCCESS

**When I was younger, my parents used to take my two brothers and me to an amusement park every summer.** As the oldest of three, I would always have to sit on “the hump”—the middle seat. After three hours of driving, my parents would always ask, “Wasn’t that a great ride?” It was then that I realized that two things can be true at the same time: we can ride in the same car and still experience that ride very differently. In the front, my parents had space to move and stretch out their legs, while my brothers and I were constantly trying, and failing, to get comfortable.

Thinking about those rides reminds me of the workplace. Many of us may work for the same company or organization but experience that workplace very differently. While one employee may never suffer from discrimination, another may endure microaggressions several times a day. Those in the dominant group might find that they have access, agency and sponsorship, never understanding what it’s like for people in the minority, who may feel singled out as the “only” ones or notice that they are treated differently from their co-workers. To make an organization work for everyone, all employees have to take a hard look at where they sit in the hierarchy, how they benefit and how they can make the environment comfortable and equitable for their co-workers.

The first step is hiring more thoughtfully—which means more employees from underrepresented backgrounds at all levels of the company. Studies show companies with diverse and inclusive cultures outperform organizations that do not invest in diversity. The next is assessing your privilege. If you have power, how could you leverage it to help someone who might sit in a different position? If you are a manager, what would you learn if, instead of focusing on your “go-to” people (often the ones who remind us of ourselves), you asked everyone on your team, “What do you need from me to do the best work of your career while you’re here?”

Equity takes intentionality. It also takes courage. Giving employees a psychologically safe space to articulate how they might be experiencing the workplace, without fear of blowback or dismissal, requires willingness to have difficult conversations and active listening. This is how you build stronger workplace relationships.

Creating an equitable workplace shouldn’t be the job of the chief diversity officer, but truly of all employees, because success is not a solo sport. It’s no longer acceptable to disregard experiences or concerns if they don’t align with ours. Each of our job descriptions should entail authentically engaging, listening and enhancing the workplace for everyone, regardless of race, gender or identity.

—Minda Harts, founder and CEO of the Memo

## INVEST IN PUBLIC-INTEREST TECHNOLOGY

**If we don’t approach technology with a public-interest perspective,** we will further hurt marginalized communities. We have to train people for careers in digital fields so they bring an informed perspective; enact policy to ensure technology serves those historically subject to discrimination; and require accountability from companies in pursuit of public-interest goals. Technology should seek to reduce and eradicate discrimination, not perpetuate it.

—Darren Walker, Ford Foundation president

## EMBRACE A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO READING

**Culture teaches us how to perceive the world.**

So much of who we are as adults comes from what we’re exposed to as kids. But for a long time, one group has decided for us all which stories—histories and fiction alike—are worthwhile. We need to offer depth and nuance in representation in stories, and ensure that children read across all divides. Equity is impossible to achieve if we can’t perceive one another’s experiences as real. Ideally, the world of books starts to reflect our lives.

—Lisa Lucas, publisher

## CREATE AN INDEPENDENT BODY TO REVIEW POLICE KILLINGS

**When controversial police shootings occur, the department responsible for the shooting is often tasked with investigating it.** And the people in the local district attorney’s office—who decide whether to prosecute—also regularly work with the police, which critics argue leaves too much room for bias.

The solution proposed by activists: appoint independent bodies to investigate and decide whether to prosecute police shootings. These groups, which experts argue would ideally be formed at the federal level and housed in regional districts across the country, would be solely responsible for investigating civilian deaths that involve police officers in their respective regions—with federal authority and resources. Such a system could allow for more even-handed examinations of officer-involved shootings.

During her 2019 campaign, Vice President Kamala Harris proposed what might be a complementary body, “a National Police Systems Review Board, which would collect data and review police shootings . . . and work to issue recommendations and implement safety standards based on evidence revealed in these reviews.” Of course, independent bodies would not fully address the myriad issues raised by police shootings. But at the very least, victims’ families could know that the deaths of their loved ones were investigated by unbiased officials.

—Josiah Bates



## COMMIT TO RAISING EQUITY-CONSCIOUS CHILDREN

**One of the most difficult things about studying courage, vulnerability, shame and empathy is trying to live up to the findings**—and the single greatest challenge comes from what I’ve learned about parenting. We can read all the books and go to all the classes, but in the end, it comes down to one question: Are we being the adults we want our children to grow up to be?

Who we are, how we show up, our behaviors—these are much better predictors of who our children will be and what they’ll believe about themselves and the world. The foundation of raising equity-conscious children is modeling equity-conscious behaviors. Do our

children see us challenging ideas, even when it’s unpopular to do so? Are we modeling the importance of being learners over knowers? Do we talk openly about our struggles to have difficult conversations—and our commitment to doing it anyway? Do we point out inequity in the world and in our own lives?

Equity consciousness requires deep reflection and learning. Teaching ideals is never as powerful as modeling the vulnerability it takes to achieve those ideals. Are we inviting our children to be part of our own work? Even the uncomfortable parts. Especially the uncomfortable parts.

—Brené Brown, researcher

## ENSURE ALL PEOPLE HAVE ACCESS TO GENDER-AFFIRMING HEALTH CARE

**As I settle in as Assistant Secretary for Health, I am humbled to be the first openly transgender individual to serve in a Senate-confirmed position.**

I stand on the shoulders of those who came before—people we know from the history books and those we will never know because they were forced to live and work in the shadows. We’ve come a long way, but still have a long road ahead. A 2019 Reuters/Ipsos poll found that most Americans do not know that LGBTQ people lack federal protections. Raising awareness is an important step, but we also need to turn awareness into action by working together across agencies and organizations. Also, the federal government must continue to lead by example and showcase the importance of full federal LGBTQ equality.

We’re making strides and have started to revive and expand Department of Health and Human Services work on LGBTQ policy changes across offices and programs. I want everyone, trans youth in particular, to know there is a place for you in our government and in America. As President Biden said during his first joint address to Congress, “To all transgender Americans watching at home, especially the young people. You’re so brave. I want you to know your President has your back.”

—Dr. Rachel Levine, Assistant Secretary for Health

## CHANGE PUBLIC-SCHOOL FUNDING

**School funding depends heavily on property taxes.** School districts serving wealthier, white students tend to be well resourced, while those serving low-income students and students of color receive far less funding. “Those funding gaps translate to fewer high-quality opportunities every day,” says Ary Amerikaner of the nonprofit the Education Trust. To remedy this, experts say the federal government should boost funding to schools serving low-income children, and states should target aid to students with the most needs and districts with lower property wealth. —Katie Reilly

## DISMANTLE ABLEISM

**As a Black disabled woman, no U.S. law effectively protects me from ableism, racism and misogynoir.** The federal government needs to strengthen the Americans With Disabilities Act; the fact that we need a law to combat discrimination against disabled people makes clear where people stand. But the real catalyst for change lies in individuals’ confronting their ableist notions. Ensuring equity doesn’t mean you should try to save us. Help instead by eradicating the injustices that impact us.

—Vilissa Thompson, founder of Ramp Your Voice!

## ABOLISH THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

**The core case for the direct national election of America’s President is simple: equality.** Each American voter should count equally: Black or white, Democrat or Republican, urbanite or country dweller.

Direct election was a political nonstarter at the founding of our country. Such a system would have given the South no credit for its slave population. (Slaves don’t vote.) The founders thus hatched a complex system allowing slave states to count their bondsmen, albeit at a discount. Each slave would count for three-fifths of a free person in apportioning both the House of Representatives and the Electoral College. Virginia, with its large slave population, was the big winner: eight of the first nine presidential elections crowned a slaveholding Virginian. Northerners complained, but to no avail, even after the three-fifths clause notoriously advantaged Virginia’s Thomas Jefferson over New England’s John Adams in the 1800 presidential contest.

The best argument for keeping the current system is inertia. It’s the devil we know, and any changes could trigger unanticipated consequences. Defenders of the status quo also say the system reflects American federalism, but direct election could harness a superior version. In direct election, the more who show up to vote in state X, the more clout X has in the national count. States would be incentivized to encourage voter turnout. They would become laboratories of democracy—federalism at its best—subject to congressional supervision to keep it fair.

—Akhil Reed Amar, author of *The Words That Made Us*



## END HOMELESSNESS

**The past year was not a good one, particularly for people experiencing homelessness.** For one, they faced a uniquely severe level of risk of contracting COVID-19, given the prevalence of risk factors in homeless populations. And if that wasn't enough, federal data show that unsheltered homelessness among individuals grew by 7% at one point in 2020, with some of the most vulnerable people with disabilities leading the increase.

Also, most minority groups continued to be overrepresented in the homeless population, because of historical and structural racism; Indigenous and Black people experience some of the highest rates every year. How can homelessness systems ensure vulnerable people get housed at this critical juncture and improve equitable outcomes? As a starting point, the field now has more tools to house people experiencing homelessness, such as the recently passed American Rescue Plan Act. Communities should take full advantage of current resources like vouchers and expanded services to improve housing opportunities. But while this will impact homelessness broadly, without intentional efforts, it may not impact it equitably.

Racial equity must be part of any strategic planning—data analysis can help determine where disparities might exist and what might be done about them. The homelessness field will not be able to solve all of the nation's racial problems, but it can make an impact. The ultimate goal is to end homelessness—advocates should keep fighting for resources and take advantage of all the tools currently available to house the most vulnerable in an equitable way.

—Chan Crawford, director,  
individual homeless adults for the National  
Alliance to End Homelessness



## CREATE UNIVERSAL PRE-K

### High-quality preschools give families options.

They set kids up for success and boost every sector of the economy. Yet day-care and preschool costs are the greatest expense facing parents of young children in the U.S. today. Being unable to send children to preschool forces women out of the workforce and has a negative impact on Black, brown and low-income children who have less access to high-quality programs.

What's more, about 95% of childcare workers are women, and close to half are women of color—most of them are underpaid and underprotected.

In Portland, Ore., the Universal Preschool Now! Coalition is cheering on the Biden Administration's call for a tax on the wealthy to extend the opportunity of childcare and preschool to all. Last November, our coalition of parents, childcare providers and preschool workers helped pass a local version of Biden's plan in Multnomah County. We now know from experience that providing universal, quality care is a part of the fight for social, racial and economic justice. We must ensure the workforce is respected and well compensated. We must create truly universal programs,

because all kids benefit from mixed-income classrooms. If we want to make sure that families with the means pay, Biden has it right: tax them.

Finally, we feel strongly that this is about care, not coercion: expulsions have no place in pre-K. And *universal* does not mean mandatory. Universal means that no parent has to choose between working to earn money for housing and food, and paying for childcare and education. Universal means every young child gets the opportunity to thrive.

—Lydia Kiesling,  
author

## PROTECT WORKERS FROM ANTI-UNION INTIMIDATION



**What American would not like to belong to a club** whose members receive 11% higher pay, and are more likely to receive employer-sponsored health care and paid sick days? If that club is a union, the answer is complicated. While 65% of Americans support the existence of unions, just 11% of workers are members. Forming labor unions is difficult, made clear in a recent union drive by workers at an Amazon plant in Bessemer, Ala. Though more than half indicated they wanted to unionize last year, less than a third voted to do so in the April election.

Some were likely swayed by Amazon's efforts, which included mandatory anti-union informational sessions—something Democrats in Congress are attempting to outlaw. The RWDSU, the union trying to organize in Bessemer, has appealed the election results, alleging Amazon illegally threatened unionizers with layoffs. (Amazon says RWDSU is “misrepresenting the facts.”) “Our system is broken,” RWDSU president Stuart Appelbaum said during the vote count. “Amazon took full advantage of that.”

—Abby Vesoulis



## ABOLISH CASH BAIL

**At 16, Kalief Browder found himself caught up in America's cash bail system.** The Black teen spent three years behind bars on Rikers Island without trial because his family couldn't initially raise his \$3,000 bail following a robbery charge that he denied and which was ultimately dropped. Two years after his release, Browder died by suicide.

His story is tragic but not unique. Nearly half a million people in the U.S.—43% of them Black—are currently detained before trial. The bail system, which often requires defendants or their families to stump up large sums of cash in a short window, is reminiscent of 19th century debtors' prisons, in which those who were unable to pay court-ordered judgments would be locked up until they'd worked off their debts or secured funds to pay the balance.

For those without the means to pay, cash bail can trigger a set of life-changing events as part of the "spiral effect." The first level is loss of employment, followed by the risk of losing housing and vehicles. These circumstances can sometimes contribute to losing child custody. There are several steps that could help end the spiral: Community investment to meet individuals' basic needs. Policing reforms to stop arrests for low-level offenses and crimes resulting from poverty. Use of citations for such crimes. Improving access to mental-health and/or substance-abuse treatment programs. Use of court reminders and better communication with defendants about their cases. Combined with these measures, ending cash bail is one way to dismantle inequities faced by people who enter the U.S. criminal-justice system.

—Keturah J. Herron, *ACLU of Kentucky*



## PROTECT THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

**We are living in a time** when people are trying to call out the contradictions of America—in policing, in education, in health care—on their own terms. But in so many instances, the Black community and other oppressed groups are told: "Here's your spokesperson. This is how you protest, and here's how you address the issue."

We've witnessed, to some extent, how far the system will go in order to stop people from fighting for self-determination.

We are aware of how law-enforcement agents use surveillance, arrests and technology to stop communications. When we leave protests, we see boots being put on the wheels of our cars. And we've seen this for years: how entities like the Counterintelligence Program engaged in intimidation; deception; and, in the case of my father Chairman Fred Hampton and others, assassination.

As Minister Huey P. Newton wrote: "Laws should be made to serve

the people. People should not be made to serve the laws." And yet today bills in 34 states would restrict demonstrations or protect drivers who hit protesters. Whether Democrat, Republican or the Black Panther Party's Ten-Point Program, people should be able to say whatever reflects their communities' realities, and articulate their needs without fear of repercussions.

—Fred Hampton Jr.,  
activist and chairman  
of the Black Panther  
Party Cubs

## TEACH SEX AND CONSENT EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS



**We must mandate comprehensive sex education in schools that is culturally competent and includes instruction on consent.**

The Consent Awareness Network and other organizations are leading an effort to pass laws that define consent as a "freely given, knowledgeable and informed agreement." I would also add revocable. That definition is important because a lot of sexual violence happens in so-called gray areas because of varying understandings of consent. But unless we teach this in schools, we won't change the culture. We teach children how to say

*please and thank you*, and to not run with scissors; we can teach them about consent and boundaries. Sex education should also be expansive and inclusive of all identities. What if we started now? Start programs in kindergarten and layer on that education until graduation. After 13 years, you will have a group that has learned about things like respect, sexuality and healthy relationships. The Me Too movement is about making sure we get to a place where a new generation doesn't have to say "me too." We can't get there without these efforts. —Tarana Burke, founder of Me Too



## IMPROVE DIVERSITY IN CLINICAL RESEARCH TRIALS

**The COVID-19 vaccines have been remarkable** so far—both in how quickly they were developed and for their safety and efficacy. And they may leave another legacy lasting well beyond the pandemic. Because the disease hit Black and Hispanic communities hardest, scientists in the U.S. focused intentionally on ensuring people of color were represented in the studies of the vaccines. Addressing equity in this way should extend beyond the pandemic-related research to any studies of new therapies going forward, says Dr. Clyde Yancy, vice dean for diversity and inclusion at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine.

And that's only one critical aspect of broadening diversity and equity in clinical trials going forward. Lack of trust in the medical establishment remains a major hurdle in many communities. Decades of exploitation and abuse of people of color in medical research, from the Tuskegee experiment, in which hundreds of Black men were recruited in a syphilis study under false pretenses throughout the mid-1900s, to Henrietta Lacks, whose cancer cells were used through the latter half of the 20th century by scientists without her permission, have fostered a deep and justifiable skepticism of doctors, researchers and the health care enterprise. Here again, the COVID-19 vaccine studies may

serve as a valuable model: to ensure people of color participated in the trials, respected scientists and religious and cultural leaders helped to educate communities about the trials, and facilitate discussions about the risks and benefits involved. "We need to reframe the conversation about research so people don't approximate research with someone doing experiments on other people but instead recognize it's how we learn," says Yancy. "Then we can definitively answer the question, 'Was someone who looks like me and has life experiences like me in the trial?' We can absolutely say, 'Yes, someone like you in the trial responded at least as well if not better than others in the study.'"

The vaccine studies are also showing how to address some of the practical reasons people are reluctant to participate in research, including challenges getting to the trial site and having to miss work. "Why can't we make trials more local; why do we insist that patients come to a major medical center?" says Yancy. "These simple things in how you execute a trial can make a big difference in recruiting more diverse populations. This model can be replicated time and time again; it's a wonderful lesson learned of extrapolating from the vaccine trials to other medical and device investigations in the future."

—Alice Park

## ENSURE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY ARTS EDUCATION

**Kaden Robinson, 17, credits a Boys & Girls Clubs program with helping him learn to express himself:** "I cannot imagine being the person I am without art." He's not alone; studies show engagement with the arts can help young people deepen empathy and picture what's possible. Yet spending on arts education has declined, and students of color in particular miss out on opportunities. Ensuring all children have a high-quality arts education will help expand their sense of self—and possibility—in the world.

—Bahia Ramos, the Wallace Foundation

## FOSTER RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN POLICE AND COMMUNITIES

**When it comes to equity, we can't ignore how a community is treated by its police officers.** Law enforcement needs to work to transform their often contentious relationships with disenfranchised communities, which can lead to a cycle of mistrust and violence. Dialogue is crucial, and police departments, which wield the power, must reach out to community activists in an effort to start that conversation.

—Josiah Bates

## PRACTICE ALLYSHIP

**Allyship makes me think of linking up with your favorite cousins at Grandma's house.** When a fight erupts over toys, at least three kids run to rat to Grandma, who then shares lessons on diplomacy. Everyone is prepared to push through the evening because, above all, everyone wants to see the cousins have a good time and enjoy themselves. It's about facing what happens without failing to learn.

This doesn't mean inequities don't exist among the cousins. One may live with Grandma because of a nonfunctioning parent, a pain point, but in this house, they have the privilege because it's their room and their toys. They can dictate the rules—rules negotiated with Grandma for their benefit. We all have things that set us back; we all have some measure of power.

The greatest allies make me think of the best cousins—the ones who share, offer snacks, and go grab the shy cousin who is sitting alone and convince them to play. Allies correct the misbehaving cousin while at the same time offering them a road to redemption.

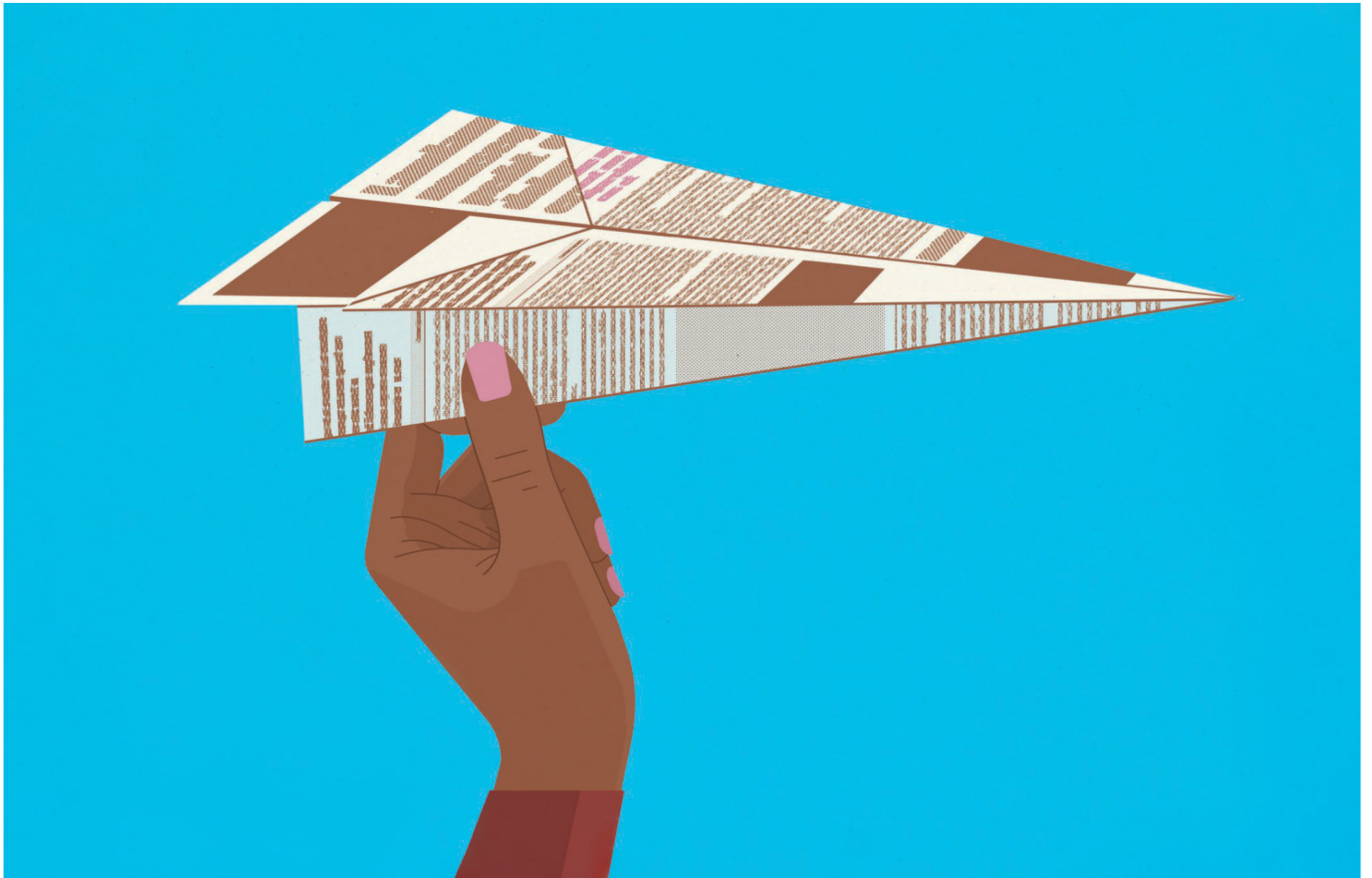
This is work everyone can do, and everyone should. It's because of the best cousin's care that 20 years later, the whole family is still sitting together at reunions and weddings—not because they all have the perfect relationships, but because they know how to work together. Their intent is continually showcased in their actions.

—Kimberly Jones, author of *How We Can Win*



# Living the news

TIME JOURNALISTS REFLECT ON A YEAR OF COVERING STORIES ON THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES



## The power of vulnerability

By **Naina Bajekal**, editorial director, newsroom development

SHORTLY AFTER I GRADUATED FROM UNIVERSITY in 2014, I went for dinner with three college friends, all white women. When the conversation turned to job applications, one expressed frustration that her company's push for diversity had made it difficult for interns like her to get hired. "I don't think anyone should be getting a job just because of the color of their skin," she said, turning to me. "You'd hate that too, wouldn't you?"

My face felt both hot and numb, tension coiled hard in my chest. I pushed back on the implication that hiring minorities meant a lowering of standards and presented the business case for diversity, but I did not say how the conversation made me feel.

I'd entered the workforce armed with a copy of *Lean In* and high hopes to climb the ladder and make a difference. When I became an editor, I had the power

to make choices I felt passionate about—to hire, give assignments and elevate voices—but I rarely saw myself reflected at the mostly white decisionmaking table. Eager to grow, I devoured books and articles on leadership, usually by white women who preached about ambition, seizing opportunities, negotiating salaries and talking in meetings. The message was clear: Get the system to work for you.

For many years, I tried that. Corporate diversity tends to reward people of color like me—well-off, highly educated minorities whose presence assuages the guilt of white leaders without requiring them to create truly inclusive companies. Any hostility I faced just became fuel to prove myself, as if there might be a magical threshold that, once crossed, would stop anyone from implying I was a "diversity hire." It was easy to believe I was showing up authentically



at work when I was editing stories on gender and race, or speaking up if I felt our editorial choices were problematic, but I had also internalized the message that leadership meant being strong and upbeat under pressure. All good, I would say when a colleague apologized for a hurtful remark, totally fine. I would swallow it all down, my anger or my sadness, and put on my good-soldier uniform to complete the next task.

Journalists often talk about compassion fatigue, as if getting hardened to the horrors of the world is an inevitable result of being routinely exposed to traumatic situations and stories. In newsrooms, as in many offices, we're encouraged not to bring our emotions to work. "The story comes first." "You are not the story." The old journalistic maxims are drilled into my psyche and I've lived by them, reporting on terrorism while barricaded in a Paris restaurant and editing pieces about the risks of COVID-19 to ethnic-minority communities while worried for my parents, both frontline doctors. If I let myself feel all my feelings, I told myself, I wouldn't last another day on the job.

As with many women of color, not allowing anyone to see my pain let me convince myself, and my colleagues, that I was so resilient I didn't need support. The truth is that we can't even begin to change the system if we aren't talking about how the system makes us feel. Empathy is core to doing the kind of journalism that serves and reflects different communities. It's also crucial within our own newsroom: if we want to retain the journalists from marginalized groups who are best equipped to tell these stories, we cannot expect them to leave their emotions at home.

Transforming our workplaces and building solidarity have become increasingly urgent in recent

years: the #MeToo movement sparked conversations about sexual harassment and assault, while stories from the "girlboss" era of the 2010s showed how white women weaponized and abused their power to create their own toxic workplaces. But knowing what behaviors to avoid isn't the same as demonstrating the more humane model that can take its place.

Perhaps that's because we're still forging it. In March, after a white male shooter in Atlanta killed six Asian women, I watched two of my closest colleagues, both Asian-American women, cry in calls with members of senior management. For the first time, I resisted the urge to hide my tears. I was learning from them the value of showing up with my heart, rather than just my words. It can be a radical act to allow yourself to be seen.

Since then, I've thought more about the opportunity I have as a woman of color to help redefine what leadership looks like. I know now that holding it together is not the only way to earn respect, that vulnerability and empathy are crucial leadership traits. I am having more honest conversations with my colleagues than ever before—saying when I am hurting and when they have hurt me. I am raising my expectations about how I should be treated, communicating when my co-workers are being good allies and when they are not, and listening when I might be falling short too. When I receive apologies now, I try not to swallow my pain, but instead say, Thank you, I appreciate that.

**WE CAN'T  
EVEN BEGIN TO  
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US FEEL**

## Taking small actions

By **Nadia Suleman**, editorial producer

ON MAY 26, 2020, I SIGNED ON TO WORK AS USUAL. My role as an editorial producer at the time consisted mostly of building articles from partners like the Associated Press. That day was no different. I was working from my hometown outside of Grand Rapids, Mich., where I'd relocated during the pandemic. But what had begun as an escape to familiarity quickly became one of the most untenable months of my career.

That day, after learning there was footage of an officer kneeling on a Black man's neck in Minneapolis, I felt sick. I understand the news cycle; stories about Black trauma break then quickly fade. Filled with dread, I went to pull one of the Associated Press's initial reports, as I was asked. It was then that I read the man in the video, George Floyd, had repeatedly told the officers, "I can't breathe." It wasn't the first time we've heard that phrase.

In the 24 hours that followed, I fixated on gruesome images—protesters being struck, tear-gassed and shot with rubber bullets. Witnessing police brutality and lynchings on my screen reminded me how expendable Black folks are perceived to be.

As a junior staffer, I didn't have the privilege of escaping—updating that post was my job. "Checking in" would later become an expected newsroom practice, but at the time, the well-being of my Black colleagues and me seemed like an afterthought. I wasn't offered a moment to step away. Instead, I felt like I needed to desensitize myself to my own oppression. There were no Black editors around to tell me otherwise. Already isolated because of the pandemic, I grew numb, then resentful because policy barred expressing views on anything seen as political. (Our guidelines now allow protesting for human



rights.) Still, I felt I had to do something—I knew that if Black people weren’t involved in telling our stories, these stories could be botched.

Despite my place in the hierarchy, I did have a small yet crucial power: I had a say in the headlines. As the largely peaceful protests went on for weeks, I saw often two words in the default text: *violent* and *riot*. These dog whistles underscored the media’s interpretation of the Black resistance: We were the aggressors. Too loud, too combative, too Black. So rather than using the provided headlines, I’d write ones without the coded language.

Although it isn’t common practice to include the names of people unknown to the public, given the long-standing erasure of Black history, I made a point to write them: George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery,

Breonna Taylor. But I was torn between wanting to make sure they were remembered and worrying about contributing to the idea that they were martyrs, that their deaths were necessary for us to inch closer to equity. I felt alone in making these choices, as the only Black person who’d touch the stories.

I don’t have all the answers, nor do I have the power to fix things on my own. None of us does. But what I’ve learned is that even small actions compound. Over the past year, after asserting myself more, I’ve been invited into conversations I was shut out from before. I’m no longer merely writing headlines for others’ stories—now I’m helping launch projects I’m passionate about. I’m learning to be confident in my perspective and to demand what I deserve.

## Identity as expertise

By **Sanya Mansoor**, reporter

IN 2017, WHILE REPORTING ON THE TEXAS legislature, I attended a Homeland Security hearing held by Republican lawmakers on how to protect the state from “radical Islam.” The panel came days after a legislator sent out a survey to mosques across Texas, posing questions about their beliefs and their commitment to remain nonviolent.

As the session was wrapping up and the crowd began to disperse, a white TV reporter standing near me asked the legislator if he would hold a similar forum on radical Christian or Jewish groups. A former state lawmaker cursed him out for raising that idea, and another woman nearby questioned why the reporter was comparing these religions, insinuating that Islam was inherently more violent. When I asked her how she could make that suggestion, she demanded to know how I could support the religion as a woman.

The attack felt personal, but while I knew her argument was Islamophobic and wrong, I also questioned myself. I felt unprofessional for taking off my stoic reporter hat and engaging with someone’s hateful dialogue on that level. I was so flustered I had to leave. Outside, a state trooper asked me if I was O.K. I said I was, and I still had a story to file, which I did later that day. But the experience showed me that we can’t always compartmentalize when reporting on our own identities.

Over the past few years, I’ve realized we don’t have to. Our lived experiences are not emotional biases, but a source of expertise. I’ve reported stories about the Muslim and African ban as well as anti-Blackness within the Muslim community, and brought to them a level of authority. I understand that Muslims are not a monolith, but my own experience with religion and the way hatred toward it

manifests helps inform the approach I take—from the sources I interview to the way I frame stories.

I’ve learned that I can be a better storyteller if I think about what I would want to read, rather than trying to write every piece for a white audience. In a story about a pandemic-era Ramadan, for instance, I went beyond the “Not even water?” comment Muslims so frequently hear when they tell non-Muslims they are fasting, and focused instead on more nuanced experiences. I thought of Khalid Latif, the imam who often leads the Friday prayer I attend at New York University, and asked if he could help me find Muslims willing to discuss their pandemic Ramadan. Over the next few days, my inbox was flooded with more than 100 stories from those who likely trusted Khalid the way I did.

One of several stories that made it into the piece was about a Muslim doctor who shaved his beard—which he’d kept for religious reasons—so he could properly wear PPE while treating COVID-19 patients. As he sat with the body of a Muslim man who had been declared dead, the doctor read him a special prayer Muslims say after someone has passed away, because he wasn’t sure the patient would get a proper funeral. As a Muslim, I understood the weight of that prayer—“*inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji’un*” (“Truly, to Allah we belong, and truly, to Him we shall return”)—and that this recitation spoke to the depth of the service the doctor provided. It was an act I highlighted in my story because I intrinsically knew how it would have brought the patient’s family comfort, in a way that a non-Muslim reporter likely wouldn’t.

Bringing this level of firsthand knowledge isn’t something I can put on a résumé, but it’s just as valuable to my work as a journalist, if not more.



# Learning by example

By Jenna Caldwell, production associate

Read more at  
[time.com/  
reflections](https://time.com/reflections)

I GRADUATED FROM COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY Graduate School of Journalism in May 2020 and started working for TIME the following month—my first big-girl job—during a pandemic, amid the protests for Black lives.

In graduate school, especially at a predominantly white, elite institution, there's this pressure, fueled by a sense of competition, to go out, find your story and file it, just get it done. In hindsight, I realize that pressure was traumatizing. Less than four weeks in, I was covering an attempted double homicide in the housing projects in Far Rockaway, Queens, with no one checking in on how I was doing, even as I hung around outside one of the victims' hospital rooms desperate to get a quote from his mother so as not to return to class empty-handed.

That semester, I also covered the murder of a Black man by his brother—and had to sit through the horrific details in court; the brutal and fatal attacks on Black trans women; the conditions that Black and brown housing-project tenants were subject to; the impact of the Newark, N.J., water crisis on the city's poor, Black residents; and so much more.

At every corner I was confronted with a new trauma, and at every corner I was critiqued—I should have found a better subject, I should have gotten a better quote. I felt like a shell of myself, someone going through the motions, operating on the hum of anxiety. In the same vein that Black people, and their humanity, are disregarded when their murders become viral, or when the only reflections they see of themselves in the media involve pain and suffering for the sake of storytelling, I was expected to become desensitized to the subjects I covered. I eventually broke down. I called my mom, crying to her that I didn't have what it took to be a journalist, if this is what journalism entailed. I wanted to drop out.

It didn't help that I was discouraged from reporting on the things I wanted to cover—I was told that identity and culture weren't beats, and that if I wanted to be taken seriously, I couldn't write about things like colorism or the natural-hair movement. When I made a complaint about treatment by a faculty member, I

was told that the journalism world wasn't "soft and fluffy" and I would have to get over it.

So I came to TIME thinking that to be good at my job, I could not be vulnerable. I second-guessed my pitches and my work, worried that my ideas for culture stories and profiles would be dismissed as "fluff."

**I WAS SO RELIEVED** to be wrong. My mentor, matched with me through the BIPOC employee resource group, is one of our staff writers, and she not only helps me with the mechanics of crafting culture

pitches, but she also understands the significance of the people I put forward for consideration. After one of my ideas was declined, despite our best efforts to make the case, she encouraged me to keep trying, and now I'm thrilled to be working on a profile of a South American artist for one of our biggest franchises.

Advocating on behalf of yourself isn't something you learn in school—frankly, in my experience, it was discouraged. It's something you can truly learn only by witnessing how it's done up close. I've seen the way my colleagues speak up no matter what, whether it's to demand better working conditions through the union or to convince the higher-ups of a story's merits. They have inspired me to advocate not only for my work, but also for myself. Over the past year,

I've fought to become a full-time employee and to be paid a higher salary. My peers have made me a better video producer, a better journalist and, ultimately, a stronger person.

So at 23 years old, as a young Black woman, I can't say it's been easy to cover the news. I am still faced with emotionally trying assignments; I was asked to produce a profile of Sybrina Fulton, Trayvon Martin's mother, in August, the week Jacob Blake was shot. And I may always have to oversell a pitch and explain the value of telling Black stories that aren't reduced to pain or suffering. But my peers have given me a community to lean on, and a model to ensure that my voice is heard.

ADVOCATING  
ON BEHALF OF  
YOURSELF ISN'T  
SOMETHING  
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SCHOOL. IT'S  
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# TimeOff Opener

## MOVIES

### Becoming ourselves, again, at the movies

By Stephanie Zacharek

**O**VER THE PAST YEAR, MOST OF US HAVE SPENT at least some time speculating on the ways in which the pandemic will change us. We're never going to take hugging for granted. We're going to wear sequins for daytime. We're going to look forward to boring in-person meetings, having learned that boring Zoom meetings are hardly an improvement. To this cheerful patchwork vision of our future selves, I'm adding one hopeful scrap: we're going to go to the movies more.

This summer, in countries that have made good progress in getting people vaccinated, many of us will at last venture back into movie theaters, and there's enough on the summer slate to entice people from their lairs: Scarlett Johansson gets her own corner of Marvel real estate with *Black Widow*. There are *Purge* and *Conjuring* sequels for those who'd rather be terrified in a dark theater than in their own living rooms. And Lin-Manuel Miranda's *In the Heights* might be the proverbial open fire hydrant that parched audiences need right now. The coming months will be an opportunity to step back into the darkness into a different kind of light. But even beyond that, they might be definitive in terms of how we think about small screens vs. big ones. In fact, the post-pandemic return to the theaters could turn out to be one of the most significant events in the history of watching movies: those of us who love the scale of the larger-than-life image, and the economy and completeness of stories told in one shot, will have a stronger sense of who our tribe really is.

As an avowed big-screen person myself, I concede that this vision of a happy return to movie theaters is colored as much by emotion as by logic. And it doesn't represent an easy cure for a battered industry, especially for exhibitors, some of which—notably Southern California's ArcLight Cinemas and Pacific Theatres—couldn't survive our lost year. But the movie business isn't the only one facing a recalibration of expectations. For now, as we step back into the world, let's focus on our own personal recalibration, and on what our return to big-screen movie watching might tell us.

**AS CONVENIENT AND CHEAP**, at least in relative terms, as our television screens are, there will always be stark differences between the big-screen experience and the small one. The critic Geoffrey O'Brien, in his 1993 book *The Phantom Empire*, describes the act of venturing forth from the TV room: "A bolder escape was possible. You could pull up stakes and go to the movies, as you might take a transcontinental train ride or climb a mountain. The movie screen ... was considerably more than a window. You had to pass through a number of intermediary zones—ticket booth, popcorn stand, usher's station—even



to approach it. After passing through a region of silence and blindness the spectator slid into the seat and submitted to an unearthly visitation."

Leaving the house has always represented a kind of adventure, a willingness—or eagerness—to engage with the greater world, even if, in a way, the escape to the movie theater is itself a kind of scurrying between two safe havens. But are the movies really safe? Is the act of opening ourselves to the world ever really safe? At home there's no demarcation between your sofa and the world. Surrendering to the big screen will always be different from slouching in front of the small one, no matter how cushy your home-theater setup is. (One point worth mentioning: streaming movies at home is definitely a boon for cash-strapped parents, since taking even just one or two kids to the movies means dropping a pile of dough.)

That said, people who truly love movies face a reckoning right now.





Plenty of social media soothsayers are claiming that no one will want to go back to theaters now that they're used to streaming big new releases at home. It's too inconvenient, too messy, and worst of all, you have to deal with the unpredictability of other humans. Who needs it? And yet there are those who, for whatever reason, do need the whole experience, including the unpredictability of other humans. A craving for the shared experience is our blessing and our curse. Remember those walks in the park, or on the street, in the pandemic's early days? Even for avowed loners, to see other human faces—even masked half-faces, 6 ft. away—was part of the draw. It was one hedge against feeling utterly alone.

**WHICH BRINGS US** to one of the greatest joys of moviegoing: the lure of the giant face. Give me a big face any day! Brad Pitt, Viola Davis, Chadwick Boseman, Steven Yeun—the human

face is magic, a spectacle of beauty and expression that leaves even the most elaborate special effects in the dust. There's some fine acting, and of course terrific writing, on television. But our relationship to faces seen small isn't the same. Seen large, a great face is both map and mirror, a key to our own emotions—to those we may have buried or forgotten, but also, perhaps, to those we haven't yet experienced. Despite the stereotype of the recluse who prefers movies to firsthand human encounters, I've often wondered if the faces of actors aren't one of our best means for fostering empathy.

Movies seen big offer other wonders too: wide-open landscapes that make us feel very small, explosions that shake us to our core, shoot-outs or fight

sequences that offer some primal, cathartic release. Though I believe wholeheartedly in the idea of movie love, I dislike the word *cinephilia*; it's a word that drinks its tea with its pinkie up, one that clears a room rather than opening its doors to all. An action movie, a so-called dumb comedy, a horror film you might check out on a Friday night: there's no wrong kind of movie to love, only a shared desire to lose ourselves in color and sound and movement.

My own recent return to the movie theater—to the Paris in New York, the city's last remaining single-screen theater—was to see *A Shaun the Sheep Movie: Farmageddon*. And beyond the fact that I simply can't resist an Aardman stop-motion sheep, the experience shook something loose in me. We've all been rattled and anxious for so long. Obviously, a return to moviegoing isn't going to solve all of everyone's problems. But for me—a person who has always preferred the big-screen experience, and who now realizes how much I prefer it—my *Farmageddon* excursion was revelatory. I have been so deeply unhappy not being able to go to the movies. But what if not even going back makes me happy? Then what? None of us really knows what this past year has done to our wiring, to our pre-pandemic notions of fun and pleasure. What if the outside world, even the world of movies, isn't all it's cracked up to be?

I needn't have worried. My concentration as a viewer was sharper than it's been in more than a year. I felt awake and alive in a way I haven't in ages. Maybe going to the movies is just what we need to jumpstart us back to life. We talk about surrendering to images, but maybe the act is more akin to completing a circuit, a way of sparking some interior electricity our brains and hearts didn't know they needed. Those new people we're supposed to become post-pandemic? The ones who are fun, glamorous, alive? Those are the people the movies have been training us to be all along. We're not going to meet them unless we get up off the couch. □

**The human face is magic, a spectacle of beauty and expression that leaves even the most elaborate special effects in the dust**



## CHINA WATCH

PRESENTED BY CHINA DAILY 中國日報

COMEDIANS  
STAND AND DELIVER LAUGHS

Open-mic nights put audiences in a good mood

BY XIN WEN

Running errands one afternoon, Han Yanni rushed onto a crowded subway train in Beijing, squeezing into a small space while trying not to spill her coffee.

Clinging to a strap handle, she noticed a passenger near her watching a popular soap opera, which Han had been following at home every day.

As she rode the cramped train, Han suddenly remembered a joke told by Yingning, a standup comedian, who said that when she took the subway during the rush hour in Beijing she looked over people's shoulders on different trains to watch a TV series. In 30 days of commuting, she viewed an entire series.

Han, 28, who works in the finance industry in Beijing, is an avid fan of standup comedy, an art form that is becoming increasingly popular in China.

Unlike traditional forms of Chinese comedy such as cross-talk, which follows a storyline, standup lends itself more to self-expression, imparting the humor of everyday life to audiences.

In recent years standup comedy has won fans in large cities, aided by online variety shows that have notched up more than 1 billion views.

Shi Jiefu, founder of Danliren Comedy, a standup comedy

company in Beijing, said the city is now home to about six open-mic sessions in which new comedians practice in front of small audiences, a situation hard to imagine six or seven years ago.

"Standup comedy is a worthwhile and burgeoning industry," Shi said. "It was only a matter of time before it took off."

In June 2015 he quit his job in the financial sector to become a professional standup comic, forming his own comedy company two years later.

"A comedy company can gather many talented comedians together to establish a brand," he said.

Shi estimated that about 50 standup comedy clubs were formed in China last year. With some shows debuting online, the genre has rapidly attracted a wide audience.

There are usually two types of standup performances. One involves six or seven comedians who have more than a year's on-stage experience. They perform for 10 to 15 minutes each over 90 minutes.

The other involves a one-person show featuring a well-known comic performing his or her own jokes.

There is still a dearth of comedians in China capable of performing solo onstage, Shi said.



**STANDUP COMEDY IS A WORTHWHILE AND BURGEONING INDUSTRY. IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE IT TOOK OFF."**

**SHI JIEFU,**  
FOUNDER OF DANLIREN COMEDY



A standup comedian takes a break backstage during a show in Beijing.

However, Mao Dong, 31, has been doing so for the past two years.

He names his act *Mostly Harmless*, and his jokes address young white-collar workers' concerns such as how to handle

relationships with parents who hold traditional values, achieving a work-life balance, and dealing with taxi drivers and express delivery couriers.

Mao said: "When you're onstage you expose your negative emotions and vulnerability to your audience. This is important to me, as I can show another side of my personality when I have a microphone in hand, which I don't usually reveal in everyday life."

Mao, inspired by Western standup comics, became involved in open-mic nights five years ago, when he started a clothing business in Shanghai.

"The business didn't do well at the time and I was on edge," he said.

The turning point for Mao came when a standup comedy open-mic competition was held in Shanghai.

"I won the competition and felt that I could perform this type of comedy. My confidence came flooding back."

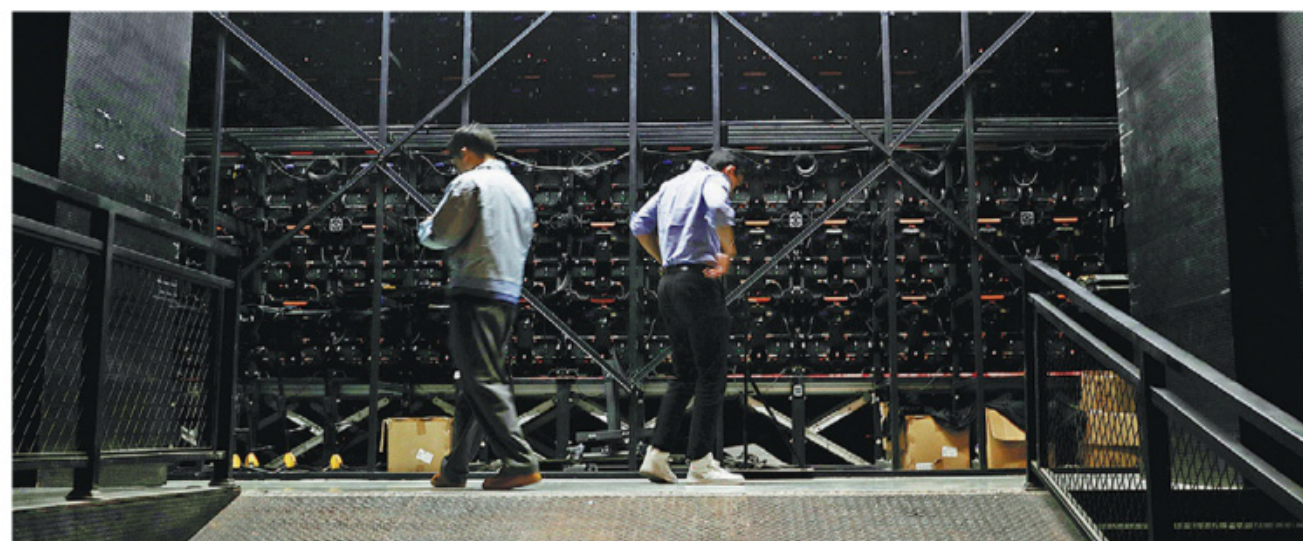
In August 2018 Mao arrived in Beijing, and two months later landed a job with an internet company. A comedy club also offered him the chance to perform part-time standup.

In December 2018 he embarked on two jobs, working from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. in an office, while performing in front of an audience from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

"Performing onstage, you have to express yourself, which includes describing your anger and problems," Mao said.

"Unlike other art forms, standup comedy attaches great importance to self-expression, so it gives you a sense of pleasure and fulfillment that other forms can't."

Mao is usually booked for five



Standup comedians prepare for a show at Tencent WeSpace Center in the 798 Art Zone, Beijing, on April 1. PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY



or six performances a week, including a solo show and gigs in which he shares the stage with other comics.

"Creating jokes is not a challenge for me, but I'm worried that after delivering the punchlines I've written, the jokes will flop with audiences."

However, such awkward moments are rare for Mao, who values his audiences, viewing them as friends, not fans.

After performing a solo show in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in March, Mao wrote a letter to the audience members saying: "We (standup comics) think we are important, but others don't take us seriously. I hope you are the ones who clearly know where your 'towel' is and deserve to be taken seriously."

According to the book *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams, a person who knows where his or her towel is lives a well-organized life.

Mao also gave each audience member a sports towel as a present.

A live standup performance typically involves four jokes being delivered a minute, and a short comedy act has sufficient material for five to seven minutes.

During the winter a stand-up comic became a hit on the internet in China with the jokes she delivered while taking part in a popular online variety show.

Xiao Lu had young audiences roaring with laughter.

Having been involved in the industry for seven years, she said she now regards standup comedy as her favorite genre.

"It makes me happy. No matter whether I have money or not, or whether I'm tired, or where my future lies, I am happy to speak out."

Huang Chuxin, director of the digital media research center at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute for Journalism and Communication, said the popularity of standup comedy has been helped by the internet.



Song Wanbo delivers jokes during a standup comedy show in Beijing on April 1.

Mao Dong tells jokes about office workers' concerns.

Comic Liu Yang performs on stage in Beijing.



Ice hockey players are welcomed by socially-distanced spectators in Wukesong Arena. XINHUA

## When Games tech goes high, risk goes low

BY SUN XIAOCHEN

With robot volunteers, microchip thermometers and 5G-enabled videoconferencing at their disposal, Beijing 2022 organizers are confident their high-tech approach will ensure an ultra-safe Winter Olympics next year.

Fine-tuning COVID-19 protocols was high on the agenda last month during an ice sports test program at five venues in downtown Beijing, with the rehearsal providing a glimpse into what participants can expect from their Olympic experience next year. The interaction between athletes and media is one aspect that is going to feel particularly different from past Games.

Following an ice hockey test game at Wukesong Arena, Jin Tairi, a coach, walked into an empty news conference room to share his post-game thoughts in online interviews, with reporters asking the questions from a separate room.

Facilitated by 5G networks, the interviews went smoothly on screens and speakers from both sides, with replays instantly available thanks to cloud computing.

"The entire conversation was loud and clear," Jin said. "It went without any delays in transmission. I think this is really necessary during the pandemic to keep everybody safe."

Mixed zones have also been modified, with window shields as tall as three meters (9.8 ft.) separating media from athletes at the National Indoor Stadium, and communication conducted via microphones and loud-speakers.

To reduce the number of operational staff and service volunteers, artificial intelligence robots will operate at both venues, delivering documents, carrying luggage and moving equipment along preset routes.

To monitor body temperatures, organizers, supported by their high-tech healthcare partners, will implement the use of wearable thermometer chips.

Each chip, about the size of a fingernail, is stuck to a person's skin by an adhesive bandage and reports any significant rises in body temperature to the control center via an app on mobile devices. The system allows the venue's medical and epidemic control team to immediately identify any abnormal body temperatures among staff or spectators.

"The traditional method we used for body temperature monitoring at main entrances and key checkpoints now seems inefficient compared with using this device," said Yin Jinshu, deputy director of medical services and epidemic control at Wukesong Arena.

"With the new technology being tested during the rehearsals, we are confident that we can identify and deal with public health risks as early as possible."

*Xinhua contributed to this story.*





## TELEVISION

### A docuseries LGBTQ viewers can take *Pride* in

By Judy Berman

POP CULTURE IS CRUCIAL IN EFFECTING SOCIAL CHANGE, but for oppressed groups, mainstream representation can be a mixed blessing. Well-meaning TV shows and movies make spectacles of violence against women and Black pain. For decades, it was rare to see LGBTQ characters who didn't conform to broad stereotypes or meet tragic ends. Even in the 21st century, as sympathetic depictions from *The L Word* to *Pose* have coincided with political progress, pop culture has struggled to expand its narrow view of queer and trans life.

The challenge in making art that aims to represent any community of millions is to do justice to its vast diversity. FX's excellent *Pride* nails it. The six-part docuseries traces LGBTQ civil rights from the 1950s through the 2000s, with an hour devoted to each decade. But instead of entrusting the entire project to the same director, producers from VICE Studios and Killer Films—the indie production company that championed the New Queer Cinema movement of the '90s—recruited a different queer, trans or nonbinary filmmaker for each episode. The decision to let those smartly chosen contributors tell stories that resonate with them, in styles that reflect each unique voice, yields a history that is artful, complex and vital without being monolithic.

Conventional wisdom holds that progress toward equality for LGBTQ people in the U.S. has moved in a straight line from the total repression of the postwar period to the nationwide legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015, a trajectory disrupted only by the trauma of the AIDS crisis. *Pride* complicates that notion. Andrew Ahn (*Driveways*) takes a revisionist



Historian Jules Gill-Peterson  
talks trans history

look at a '60s rebellion, entwined with other liberation movements, that was well under way before Stonewall. A trove of downtown nightlife footage captured by late videographer Nelson Sullivan reveals an '80s New York that partied as a means of psychic survival. In a poignant first-person episode, *The Watermelon Woman* director Cheryl Dunye filters the '70s lesbian experience through her heroes Audre Lorde and pioneering lesbian filmmaker Barbara Hammer.

Not every offbeat approach works. Tom Kalin (*Swoon*) offers a compelling take on the '50s that locates love and friendship within a queer community forced underground. But vignettes like the one in which Lavender Scare survivor Madeleine Tress, played by Alia Shawkat, directly addresses viewers might work better in a museum setting.

**ONE PITFALL** of mainstream entertainment about the LGBTQ community is the way nervous creators often take pains to make these stories palatable to straight audiences—whitewashing casts, erasing trans characters, indulging in friendly stereotypes like the sexy bi woman or the gay best friend. But *Pride* has no interest in pandering. It takes activism seriously, acknowledging same-sex marriage as an achievement while leaning into radicalism.

*Pride* isn't remedial, either. It doesn't repeat old conversations about disco or *Will & Grace*. It favors undersung heroes like author Leslie Feinberg and drag icon Flawless Sabrina over celebs. The masses embraced ballroom long ago, yet in the '90s episode, Yance Ford (*Strong Island*) broadens our view of the culture by spotlighting a trans male participant, actor Marquise Vilsón Balenciaga. There's plenty here for straight viewers to learn. More important, though, is *Pride*'s fidelity to all of the many letters, colors and identities that make up the LGBTQ rainbow.

**Pride has no  
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**PRIDE** will air on FX in two parts, on May 14 and May 21, with each installment hitting FX on Hulu the following day





Run the World's uptown girls

## TELEVISION

### City girls

Girls. That's who "run the world" in the Beyoncé hit that lends a title to this glossy comedy about four ambitious 30-something Black women in New York. Whitney (Amber Stevens West) is a high-achieving people pleaser planning a wedding despite private doubts. Son-di (Corbin Reid) is a Ph.D. student carrying on a secret romance with her mentor. After her first book flatlined, Ella (Andrea Bordeaux) is struggling to get her life back on track. Finally there's Renee (standout Bresha Webb), the flamboyant one, whose volatile marriage is always threatening to combust.

The *Sex and the City* parallels are so obvious, there's a joke about Mr. Big in the premiere. *Run the World* can certainly be sexy. But the better comparison is another classic '90s sitcom about female friends: *Living Single*, which shares an executive producer with this gem in Yvette Lee Bowser. Beyond its stylish, witty surface, the show is grounded in identity and place. Nowhere is that more eloquently expressed than in an immersive episode that follows the cast through a busy Saturday in their beloved Harlem, all the while illustrating the thrilling and terrifying serendipity of city life. —J.B.

**RUN THE WORLD** premieres May 16 on Starz

## TELEVISION

### Runway days, boogie nights

"AM I A BUSINESSMAN OR AN ARTIST?" asks the legendary fashion designer Halston, just as the second act of his career is taking off. It's a question most creative workers, TV writers included, have to answer. Sadly for Halston, played as a glamorous jerk by Ewan McGregor, he's posed it to the wrong person: a fashion publicist. "Do you have to choose?" she replies. "Yes, I probably do," he sighs. But then he doesn't.

*Halston*, an exquisitely art-directed, intermittently fascinating but mostly frustrating drama from the House of Ryan Murphy, traces an arguably brilliant man's futile attempt to serve two masters. Based on Steven Gaines' biography *Simply Halston*, the mini-series opens with a glimpse of Roy Halston Frowick's sad Indiana youth, touching on his early career as a milliner whose fortunes fluctuate with Jackie O's taste for pillbox hats. It really gets going when he combs back his hair, slathers his face in bronzer, reinvents himself as a womens-wear designer and becomes the personification of '70s excess.

Murphy & Co. had their work cut out for them in distilling decades of the Studio 54 staple's life into five episodes. No wonder the result is a mixed bag.

*Halston* is best when dramatizing his emotionally intense friendships with female artists like Elsa Peretti (Rebecca Davan) and Liza Minnelli (Krysta Rodriguez, electrifying), whose authentic warmth is a refreshing antidote to Halston's chilly artifice. Depictions of his male lovers and colleagues feel comparatively slight. All told, the subject reads as a textbook narcissist—which is a problem only because the genius of his designs remains largely unexplored. We've seen so many characters with similarly difficult personalities recently, in real life and fiction, that it's hard to care how Halston's roller coaster ends.

This is the kind of true story that lends itself to cliché, and to his credit, Murphy avoids some big ones—the coke-fueled meltdown, the tragic AIDS death, Andy Warhol. But this portrait is still constructed from materials we've seen before: An outsider running from childhood trauma. A drug problem that starts as a solution. The Faustian bargain that is sacrificing art for cash. If anyone is wrestling their own demons through *Halston*, we can only conclude that the conflict remains unresolved. —J.B.

**HALSTON** comes to Netflix on May 14



Having the time of his life: Halston (McGregor) parties at Studio 54



## CONVERSATION

# Two masters, working within the Hollywood machine

By Lucy Feldman

**W**HEN A GREAT BOOK MAKES ITS way onto the screen, as Margaret Atwood says, “it finds a whole new audience.” The legendary Canadian author of *The Handmaid’s Tale* knows a few things about this: that book was adapted into a Hulu series that went on to win 15 Emmy Awards and is now entering its fourth season. Colson Whitehead’s 2016 novel *The Underground Railroad*, which won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, comes to Amazon Prime on May 14, in a 10-episode miniseries helmed by *Moonlight* director Barry Jenkins. In a conversation for TIME, Atwood and Whitehead discussed navigating the tricky waters of adaptation.

**MA:** Have you seen the whole thing?

**CW:** I saw it in February, and I’m about halfway through a second viewing. I’m totally in love with it.

**MA:** It sounds very harrowing.

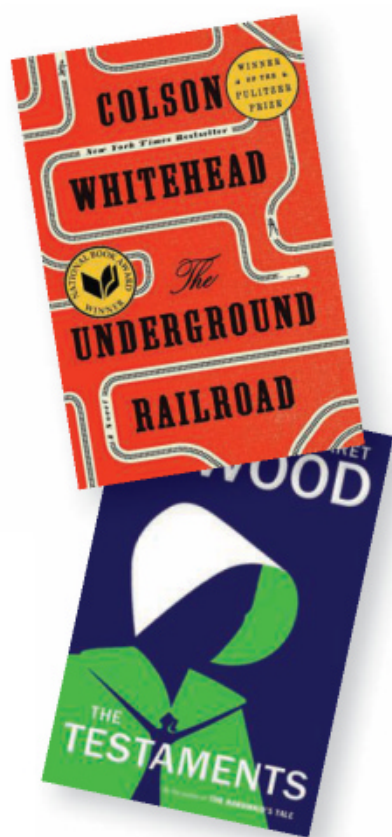
**CW:** The cinematography and Barry’s vision is so beautiful and humanistic that when we do get moments of grace and hope ... I know what happens, but I’m sort of surprised.

**MA:** You weren’t closely involved with the writing?

**CW:** No. I mean, they’re professionals. Periodically over the years I’ve been like, “Oh, maybe instead of teaching, I’ll write my screenplay.” And then I get 30 pages and I’m like, “I’d rather write a novel; this kind of sucks.” I’ll stick to what I know.

**MA:** I wrote screenplays in the ’70s. It’s a very different thing. With a novel, you are in total control: you’re a megalomaniac. With a film or television project, it’s a team. All you are is creating the coat hanger. So it matters if it’s a good coat hanger, but it’s just a coat hanger. Other people put the clothing on it; they add the bodies, they add the faces, they add the acting, they add the nuance and the directing.

**CW:** In handing it over to Barry, I felt like the book is the book, and the TV show is a TV show. I hope it’s gonna go well because it’s



Whitehead’s 2016 novel won the Pulitzer Prize; Atwood followed *The Handmaid’s Tale* with a sequel in 2019

Barry, but if it doesn’t, it’s separate. With the additional seasons for *Handmaid’s*, what was your process of letting go and letting their vision take over?

**MA:** Did I have a choice? No. I have no power. I like to think I might have some influence. For instance, I said, It is forbidden for you to kill Aunt Lydia, and they said, Well, we weren’t going to anyway. It is true that if you try to control these things, it’s not going to work, because no film or television person in their right mind would give you any sort of a veto. So the only way you could control it would be to write it, direct it and produce it yourself.

**CW:** It never occurred to me that they would change things terribly. I assumed with 10 episodes, there was enough room to get all the big things in.

**MA:** Why did it not occur to you?

**CW:** I don’t know! I was busy thinking about my depression.

**MA:** What a trusting person you are.





**CW:** I had a lot on my mind. Cold fusion. Electric batteries that power vehicles. No—the few conversations we had about Barry’s proposals about characters they would add or compress made sense to me. Their fixes for adaptation were clever—in some ways improvements. Given the constraint of 10 episodes, it never occurred to me that things would go awry. And they didn’t. Maybe I sound pretty hopeful.

**MA:** In the lead-up to the Trump election, people were saying all this “witch” language about Hillary Clinton—just straight out of the 17th century. And at the Women’s March, there were all of these signs that said: MAKE ATWOOD FICTION AGAIN. When the show launched, people reacted very strongly to it, with a lot of anxiety. Your show is coming after a couple events: the election, the storming of the Capitol and the Biden agenda that is rolling out. People might see it in a more hopeful way than they might have had that not happened. But both of these narratives are possibilities because of the way America is.

**CW:** Both books were conceived outside of what’s going on in America now. *The Underground*

**‘Both of these  
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America is.’**

**MARGARET  
ATWOOD**

*Railroad* came out a few months before Trump’s election. I remember hitting the road and seeing the insane atmosphere at his rallies and thinking, Oh, yeah—that’s why I have a lynching section in the book.

**MA:** The other thing about all of this is it’s not ancient history. It’s a lot closer to us in time than people often imagine that it is. So within ancestral memory, for instance, my father, who was born in 1906, grew up in rural Nova Scotia, where there were people who had come after escaping slavery. They wouldn’t have been young at that time, but he knew some of them.

**CW:** Different points in our history were closer to the political economy of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, closer to the white-supremacist moment described in *The Underground Railroad*. It was a shock waking up that morning in November of 2016 and realizing that what had been abstract for me—a white-supremacist government—was suddenly back in power. We go through periods of progressive action when that right-wing impulse is on the wane, but it’s always there, waiting to come back.

**MA:** I don’t doubt that. I thought that Jan. 6 moment was very scary to all kinds of people. There was little doubt that we came within a couple minutes of martial law.

**CW:** And we forget so quickly. It’s already being erased.

**MA:** Those things are always possible. I set *The Handmaid’s Tale* in the belly button of liberal democracy in America—namely Harvard. I’ve never been of the opinion that “it can’t happen here,” whatever it may be. Given the conditions, anything can happen anywhere. I wanted to gather some of those things together and put it in that place where it was not supposed to be possible. Because it is possible. It can happen. It has happened.

**CW:** For me, in terms of tackling historical subjects in *The Underground Railroad* and *The Nickel Boys*, sometimes I’m tied into what’s going on in contemporary America, sometimes not. I wrote *The Underground Railroad* in the comparatively sane days of the Obama Administration. I found more material in the past—whether in slavery or the Jim Crow moment of the 1960s. My next book: Harlem in the 1960s. I’ve sort of said my bit about contemporary America, and I’m finding different ways of talking about history, politics, race and capitalism by setting my books in the past—and trying to figure out how to make the work fresh. □



## BOOKS

### Inside stories

By Annabel Gutterman

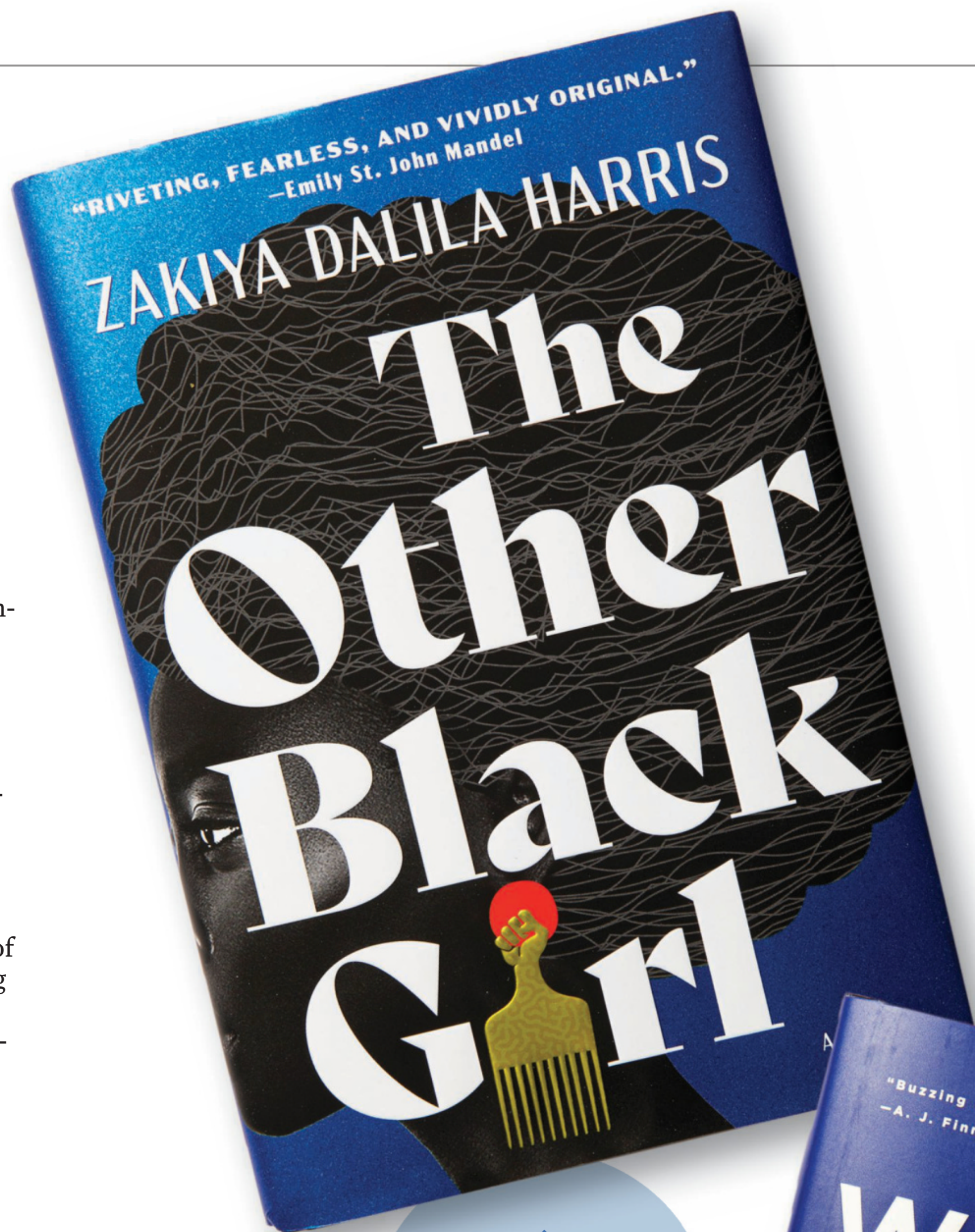
WHO KNEW THAT PUBLISHING COULD BE SO thrilling? Writing is a solitary activity—a lot of sitting around and typing quietly. Editing isn't the stuff of great drama, either. But the business of books has increasingly become a hothouse, generating controversies, Twitter feuds and scrambles to save face as existing power structures are challenged.

Three new novels navigate the thorny interior of the industry. Two are driven more by plot than interrogating real-world problems, yet all are concerned with the motivations of the people behind the stories we read. In Jean Hanff Korelitz's *The Plot*, a teacher steals the idea for a book from his dead MFA student. Alexandra Andrews' *Who Is Maud Dixon?* follows a protagonist, the assistant of a famous novelist, who will do just about anything to get ahead. And in Zakiya Dalila Harris' *The Other Black Girl*, the sole Black employee at a publishing house finds herself unexpectedly isolated after the hiring of a new Black editorial assistant.

These books arrive at a critical moment for an industry whose gatekeeping function has repeatedly been called into question. The 2020 publication of *American Dirt*, a novel about Mexican migrants written by Jeanine Cummins, a non-Mexican author, created an uproar over who has the right to tell what story. The cancellation of Senator Josh Hawley's book deal with Simon & Schuster sparked debate over the lucrative platforms given to people with potentially harmful ideas. And new calls for the same publisher to drop former Vice President Mike Pence's forthcoming memoir cite the public claims the company made last year to standing against racism, which some say hardly aligns with Pence's service to the Trump Administration.

Though these novels don't attempt to provide answers, each in its own way grapples with the same timely theme: Who gets to control the narrative?

**KORELITZ KNOWS HOW** to spin a nail-biting plot—HBO's recent hit *The Undoing* was adapted from her 2014 novel. In her May thriller, aptly titled *The Plot*, a creative-writing instructor named Jake writes a novel that revives his stale writing career. Amid his success, he begins receiving messages from someone who claims to know Jake stole the book's plot. And he did—from a now dead former MFA student. *The Plot* is filled with the hallmark twists of a suspense narrative. But beneath all the fun, Korelitz



Harris builds a thriller around the racist microaggressions and lack of inclusion in the industry she used to work in

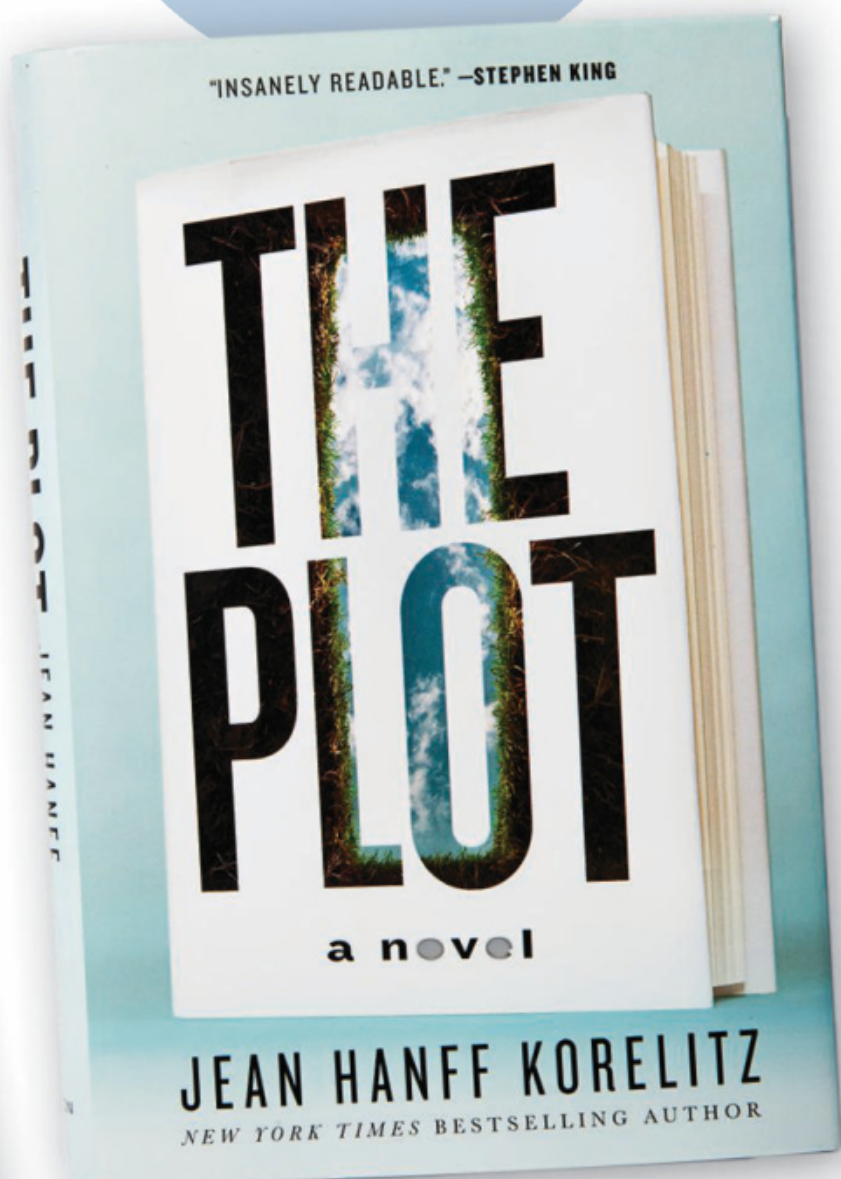
poses a serious question: Does the identity of a writer matter, as long as the story is worth telling?

This question dominated the publishing industry for a time following the release of *American Dirt*. Debate erupted over why its publisher, Macmillan, shelled out seven figures to publish this particular novel about Mexican migration and billed it as authentic. *The Plot* is only subtly concerned with conversations about race, with Jake bearing a striking lack of self-awareness when it comes to his white and male privilege. Yet as with the *American Dirt* controversy, *The Plot* explores whether fiction must be rooted in something real





Korelitz's seventh novel explores questions of authenticity and ownership in literature



Andrews' debut novel critiques the ambitions of an unscrupulous wannabe literary star

in order to be good. When Jake decries “the anxieties we have around appropriation,” or his agent chalks up criticism to cancel culture, they speak straight to a knowing reader.

Like Jake, the protagonist of Andrews' twisty March debut *Who Is Maud Dixon?* suffers little remorse over taking what isn't hers. The book, set to be adapted by *The Post* screenwriter Liz Hannah, follows Florence Darrow, a 26-year-old editorial assistant for whom the idea of success as a writer is not a matter of if, but when—a curious attitude given her utter lack of a story to tell. Through her, Andrews satirizes a certain personality common in literary circles: “Florence's Bible was *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*,” Andrews writes. “Admittedly, she spent more time scrolling through photos of Joan Didion in her sunglasses and Corvette Stingray than actually reading her, but the lesson stuck.”

This is not a story about some scrappy, upbeat assistant attempting to climb her way up. Florence is outwardly confident, internally insecure and bitterly judgmental. But what she lacks in likability is more than made up for in her captivating thoughts, fueled by resentment and misplaced aspirations. When a job assisting a best-selling author who writes under the pen name Maud Dixon leads to an unexpected opportunity to assume power she hasn't earned, Florence doesn't hesitate.

Andrews enters darker territory here as she reveals Florence's hunger to be the person telling the story. Both Florence and Jake have dubious moral compasses, and their authors render them with unsympathetic hands. The action that takes them on adventures far and wide is nowhere near as engaging as their self-destructive tendencies. The desperation for literary stardom is so acute in *Maud Dixon* it's unsettling—Florence's willingness to go to extremes has ramifications both stirring and unpredictable.

**BUT AUTHORS ARE ONLY** one part of the equation. What about the people who control which voices get heard in

**Does the identity of a writer matter, as long as the story is worth telling?**

the first place? In *The Other Black Girl*, coming June 1, Harris delivers searing commentary on racism in publishing through the eyes of Nella, the only Black employee at the fictional Wagner Books. Nella at first welcomes the hiring of another Black assistant, a cheery young woman named Hazel. Their rapport is casual, if a little forced. Then, slowly, she begins to feel a shift in power: Hazel starts reading manuscripts for Nella's editor—the one meaningful part of Nella's job—and before long she's been anointed a star. Meanwhile, Nella's been receiving hostile messages, like one that demands she “LEAVE WAGNER. NOW.”

Harris, herself a former assistant editor at Knopf, secured a seven-figure deal for the novel, her debut, in a heated auction. The author is uncompromising in her descriptions of the micro-aggressions Nella experiences at the office. When giving notes to a white author about his Black protagonist, an insulting caricature, Nella is accused of being racist and pressured to apologize. And she's increasingly disturbed by Hazel's participation in the toxic culture of their workplace. It would be easy to pit Nella and Hazel against each other in a clichéd narrative of women in competition, but Harris knows that there's no satisfying conclusion to be reached in doing so. Both women are working in an industry where they are set up to lose.

The real-world commentary in *The Plot* and *Who Is Maud Dixon?* reads as mostly incidental. But where they both succeed more as read-in-one-sitting yarns than revealing critiques, *The Other Black Girl*, though occasionally overwhelmed by its ambition, locates greater power in its most realistic elements. The central mystery propels the narrative, but Harris' most effective prose describes the moments when Nella is overlooked and dismissed. As Nella is slowly shut out of a homogeneous industry, Harris presents, in terms both humorous and horrific, the high price of gatekeeping. She asks: What difference does it make to have your foot in the door if everyone around you is set on closing it? □



# 7 Questions

**Michael Lewis** The author of *The Big Short* on spending the pandemic with the overlooked people best qualified to fight it

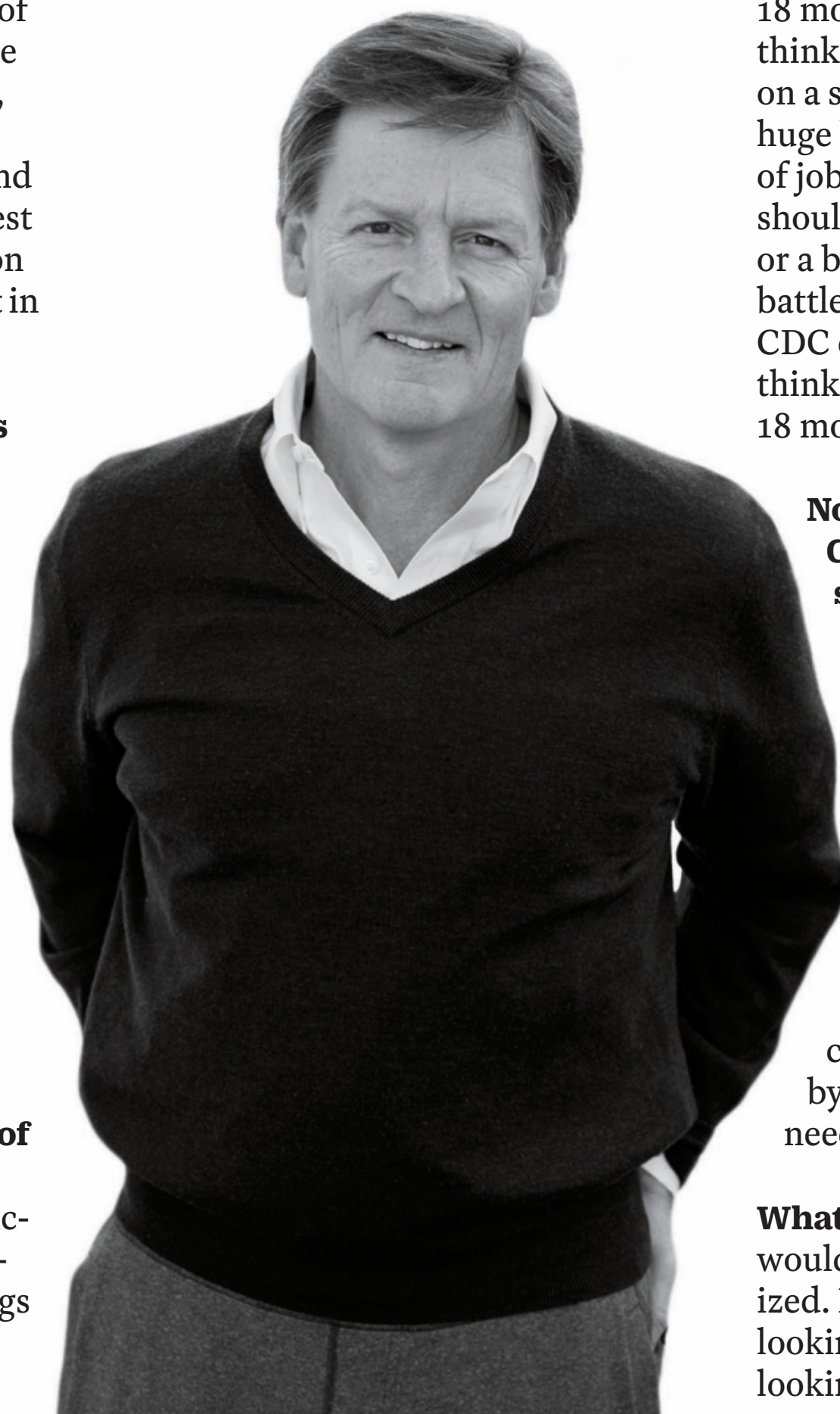
**T**he three main characters in your new book, *The Premonition: A Pandemic Story*, have their noses pressed against the window of the COVID-19 response that they probably should be running. Did you know what you were going for? When I was thinking about this book, I thought it rhymed both with *Moneyball* and especially *The Big Short*. You have this really broken system, and the center of the system is not where you go for answers. If you want to know what's going on in January of 2020, you don't go to the CDC. You don't go to the White House. You go to Carter Mecher's desk beside his bed in the suburbs of Atlanta. Or to Charity Dean stuffed in an office and being ignored by the California department of public health. Or you're gonna go to Joe DeRisi [at the University of California, San Francisco]. These people who in a sane world would be running things and are on the fringes always kind of interest me. I do feel that part of what's going on in my books is I'm sort of making right in a narrative what was wrong in life.

**Do you have to like your characters to make it work?** Yes.

**Why did this “rogue group of patriots,” as you call them, have to find each other?** That's the big takeaway: why the hell we don't manage ourselves smarter. And everybody's kind of woken up to this at once. Every CEO in America is now realizing we have to be engaged in politics in ways they don't like to because it's so screwed up. I'm just wondering if the book can kind of amplify that conversation.

**Institutions failed us. But people stepped up. Is that the main lesson of the pandemic?** The first lesson of the pandemic is that we don't have a public-health system. And so what you're seeing is people doing extraordinary things in response to the absence of a system that they should not have to do.

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The second lesson is that divided, we die. That you cannot do this in a patch-work way. Fighting the pandemic is like fighting a war. If the Russians invade, we wouldn't tell Montana and Alabama to field their armies and see if they can coordinate. The third is, it isn't an either-or thing, lives or livelihoods, containment of the virus or the economy. If you let it loose, your economy collapses too.

**What are the practical fixes, beyond making the CDC director a civil servant again?** Well, think about that. It's like we've created at the top of the American government a whole bunch of renters, as opposed to homeowners. All these people are in these jobs for 18 months to two years. One, they're thinking short term, and two, they're on a short leash, a political leash. It's a huge lesson. There are a whole bunch of jobs that should be career jobs, and it should be the norm to spend a decade or a bit in. [Then] you're not gonna let battlefield command abilities in the CDC degrade because actually you don't think a pandemic's gonna happen in the 18 months you're there.

**Now Carter and Joe are advisers to Charity's startup. Is the private sector the answer?** Charity has this fantasy she's gonna network all the public-health offices through a private company. And maybe she will do that. But really, why? Why isn't this being done already out of the federal government? We are in this weird state in our country where we have so debased the public sector that we're considering second-best solutions by doing things the public sector needs to do in the private sector.

**What would change that?** America would have to be less politically polarized. It would have to be more about looking for a good solution, rather than looking to pin blame. —KARL VICK



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The end of this issue, is not the end of this issue.

The pain is not over and the work is far from finished. That's why we're taking action. The Walmart Center for Racial Equity is committing \$100 million to help end systemic racism in criminal justice, education, finance, and health.



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